

## Health news



The controlled motions of tai chi can slow the progression of Parkinson's disease, a researcher says.

# Tai chi classes may slow Parkinson's

The slow, controlled motions of tai chi can help the impaired balance of people with mild or moderate Parkinson's disease, and the improvements persist for at least three months, according to a small study.

Compared with people who received stretching exercises, tai chi practitioners had fewer falls, longer strides and better balance, researchers found.

"Tai chi fits very well to address the problem Parkinson's disease patients face," said Fuzhong Li of the Oregon Research Institute, whose findings appear in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

Difficulty walking and remaining standing are hallmarks of Parkinson's, which results from the death of brain cells that

generate the chemical dopamine.

"We're not going to get rid of the symptoms. It's not a drug. It can't cure the disease. But, in my view, it can slow down the progression of the disease," Li said.

Li and his colleagues sent 195 seniors to one of three classes that met twice weekly for an hour.

After 24 weeks of classes, those in the stretching group saw their average score on a 100-point scale measuring how far they could shift their center of gravity without falling drop by two points, indicating some deterioration in their condition.

The typical score rose by four points in a resistance training group and by 10 points among the tai chi practitioners.