

Martial arts in the elderly.

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Balanced and constant exercising – for disabled people as well – is useful at any age. Most of the retired elderly have a lot of free time. Cultural clubs, universities for the elderly, associations, active groups and other kinds of grouping might be useful in promoting integration and stimulating elderly's interests and creativity, as well as in offering new opportunities and perspectives for a more active and valuable life.

Nevertheless, exercise seems to be increasingly important to this purpose. Indeed, a number of elderly people regularly exercise – running, cycling, swimming, skiing, climbing, playing tennis, doing gymnastic – and often practice Eastern techniques, such as yoga and Tai Ji Quan. This latter is a soft martial art consisting in simple movements and meditation. It's an old Chinese art which requires slow, circular, harmonic and rhythmic body movements, good concentration, specific abdominal breathing, good balance and ability to relax.

Tai Ji Quan is often practiced in groups and is very useful for the elderly. Researchers, indeed, have shown that it helps improving quality of life, as well as physical and mental health. Higher efficiency and coordination abilities, as well as increased muscular tonus, elasticity and dynamism were found in the elderly who regularly practice Tai Ji Quan than in control groups. For most of the elderly, it is either their first experience with exercising, or a resumption of physical activity practiced many years earlier. Therefore, it is very important to gradually start training with soft and short programmes under the supervision of a personal trainer.

Even though Tai Ji Quan requires several months of exercising to be correctly learned, it seems to meet the above-mentioned needs of the elderly. It improves the perception of one's own body and helps in daily living activities. Moreover, it is useful in prevention and treatment of a number of illnesses and specific diseases, as well as in socialization.

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