



Smooth and Steady

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A gentleman who had retired from working on the oil rigs once told me that the reason he still had all of his fingers and toes was because he remembered to go smooth and steady when working around machinery. Along the same line, in 1990, when I was first diagnosed with Type I Diabetes, one of my college professors told me that the key to maintaining level blood glucose was to pace myself. I thought I understood what this meant, but I really didn't. I was in my "super woman" phase, believing that I could accomplish anything that I put my mind to.

Over the years, I did accomplish much. My blood sugars went up and down in accordance with the lifestyles I created. I was always pushing; my adrenalin was always pumping. I blamed it on stress – trying to survive with the added expense of diabetes. Then the arthritis hit. I had no health insurance. I pushed harder to get more income, working as many jobs as I could.

Finally, my body "shouted" loud enough that I listened.

"Smooth and steady, dummy! You cannot control the challenges the universe is sending you, but you can use your mind to control your body's reaction to it. What happens when you go into fight or flight response? Your adrenalin kicks in; your blood sugar goes up in preparation for battle! What happens when you spend all that energy being afraid that you will not have money for rent, transportation, food, needles, insulin, test strips? Your blood sugar goes UP! Choose your battles carefully. Learn how to let go. Release the worries and fears. Pace yourself psychologically and physiologically to work, move, conquer - whatever - at an even tempo."

That was a tall order which was not easily or quickly accomplished or maintained. It was 1998. Nature had always been my teacher and that's where I turned. Concentrating on and experiencing its beauty, power and continuous flow taught me how to still my mind and level out the adrenalin fluctuations. A few years later, I was drawn to the movements of Tai Chi, finding them to enhance my ability to maintain that even tempo. In 2005, I discovered the Sun Style Short Form of Tai Chi and its benefits for both arthritis and diabetes. I knew that I could use it, along with my personal experience, to help others. I became a certified instructor and have been teaching Tai Chi & simple Qigong since then..

Qigong is the 5,000 year old healing art (dating back to 2500 BC) which focuses on renewing and balancing the body's natural flow of internal energy through slow movement and breath. Tai Chi is a gentle, fluid type of Qigong.

There are several forms of Tai Chi and over 3,000 different Qigong movements. The form I teach is low impact and easy to learn. It provides an almost immediate sense of accomplishment. My intention is to

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relax, moving slow to the sound of mellow music. The movements enhance and improve balance, posture, flexibility, and muscle tone. The mental component of tai chi is to focus on changing weight, aligning the spine, moving all body parts in different directions at the same time. Because one has to intentionally concentrate on the movements, all concerns, worries and thoughts that one comes into a class with go away for an hour.

The world we live in seems to tell us that we must always be accomplishing. Sitting and doing nothing is unacceptable. Tai Chi and Qigong offer a unique way of relaxing and doing at the same time. No special equipment or clothing required; can be done anywhere; no aerobic sweating; yet it burns over 240

calories an hour.

Intentional focus on slow movement strengthens the mind/body connection that often gets a bit jumbled as we age. As children we automatically shifted our weight, kept our balance. As adults we are often going so fast – moving forward in our head – that we forget, fumble, trip, fall. Mind/body connection also teaches students to identify where they are holding their stress, what is tense. They become aware of when they are in high gear, can choose to pace themselves, and know how to let go of tension. This helps the flow of the internal electrical impulses that keep us alive and functioning. Many of my students find themselves doing simple movements throughout the week at work when they feel tension build up.

Diabetes is a difficult confusing disease to live with. It's like continuously fighting an uphill battle and can easily put one into an "I give up" type of depression. How often I have wished I could just eat what I wanted when I wanted without testing my blood and giving myself shots.

Thus, especially for those of us with chronic diseases, little victories are very important. Tai Chi provides exactly that. One does not have to be a marathon runner or particularly physically fit to be able to learn and practice. For those who are dealing with excess weight, exercise can be difficult and disheartening. Yet these folks can practice this form of Tai Chi, allowing them a victory instead of the frustration of attempting a more aerobic exercise and becoming discouraged. Because Tai Chi strengthens and tones muscles in a gentle way, it can be a stepping stone to doing more strenuous exercise.

Finally, the form I teach is the only form endorsed worldwide by arthritis foundations to be safe and effective even for those with the fragile joints of mild to moderate arthritis. It is a perfect form for all ages and all abilities. It was created as Tai Chi for Arthritis by Dr. Paul Lam, a practicing family physician and Tai Chi Gold Medalist. I specifically recommend this form to begin Tai Chi practice because of its ease and simplicity, as opposed to other forms, including the more challenging Tai Chi for Diabetes form that Dr. Lam also has created.

Is Tai Chi the total answer for diabetes and arthritis? No, but it provides a valuable tool that can help in dealing with these chronic difficult diseases.

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