

Oasis From the Daily Grind

Craig Cormack of Montreal admits he used to be a nervous person. "At 26, I had stomach problems and migraines," he says. He knew this didn't bode well for his future. Cormack had noticed people practising tai chi in the park and had heard of its stress-relieving benefits, so one day he tried a class. "When I met the tai chi master and saw how relaxed and focused he was, I thought, I'd like to be like this guy."

Now 45, Cormack is like that guy. Over time and with practice, he resolved his headaches and stomach problems, and became an instructor himself.

According to preliminary studies from Tufts University researchers, tai chi is associated with reduced stress,

anxiety and depression. Cormack says that anyone can benefit from tai chi to manage both stress and its negative effects on the immune system.

What is tai chi?

> **It's a gentle, centuries-old Chinese martial art.** It involves a series of slow movements with names such as "white crane flaps wings," and "carry the tiger up the mountain." While it looks dancelike, tai chi's movements actually have self-defence applications.

How does it de-stress?

> **It makes you focus.** When you're recalling a sequence of movements, your mind simply

can't wander to thoughts of the office.

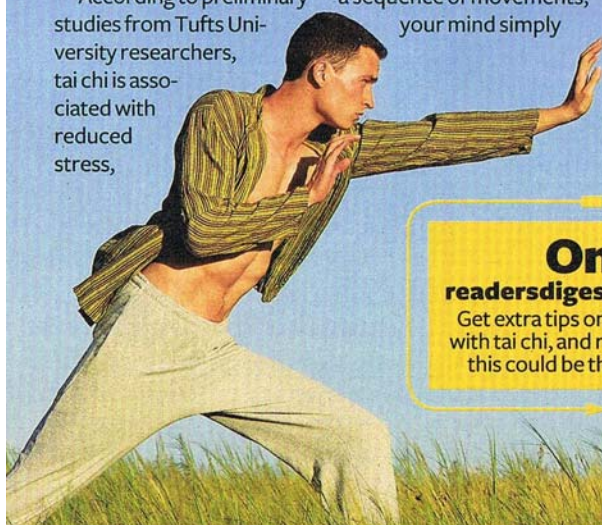
> **It slows you down.** In tai chi, you move and breathe at a steady, meditative pace.

> **It pries you away from your cellphone.** "We're always reachable these days, but that's not a natural rhythm," says Cormack, who is also a certified Chinese massotherapy practitioner. If you set aside time, he says, "when you cannot be contacted, you can then re-engage with the world with a new mind."

Ready to try?

> **Contact your local fitness centre or martial-arts school.** Try several different classes to find a teacher whose approach you prefer. Practise for about 15 minutes daily on nonclass days, and you'll start seeing benefits soon.

Julia Slater



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Get extra tips on how to get started, with tai chi, and read more about why this could be the exercise for you.