



Using Tai Chi to Improve Balance

by Adam Dawson

When a patient comes in for a routine hearing check and mentions they've struggled with dizziness and poor balance, a door to another opportunity for you to help opens. With so many innovative technologies available, accurately diagnosing balance disorders, which generally stem from the vestibular system, has never been easier. Using this equipment will help you better understand your patient's dizziness issues, which, in turn, will allow you to create a more effective treatment plan.

When it comes to treatment of vestibular dysfunction, there is a variety of methods and maneuvers that have shown proven results – from VRT to Canalith Repositioning techniques like the Epley Manuever to home-based exercises. There are also alternative therapies that are often overlooked, one of which is the ancient martial art of Tai Chi.

A low impact exercise plan that can have a huge impact on a patient's life

First practiced in China in the 1670s, Tai Chi has garnered popularity with ear, nose and throat specialists who wish to avoid recommending surgery or prescribing drugs to patients experiencing dizziness and vertigo. Tai Chi is a series of moves, slowly and deliberately executed, that is proven to improve balance in people whom suffer from frequent spells of dizziness.

And there are more people with such symptoms than you might imagine. A Johns Hopkins University study revealed that 69 million people, aged 40 and over, are up to a dozen times more likely to experience vertigo, dizziness, or other balance issues due to inner-ear problems.

The older the patient the greater the risk for falling

It's been proven that the older someone is, the more susceptible they are to developing vestibular problems. A bout of vertigo, brought on without warning, can lead to a sudden fall, which can result in serious injury or even death. That's why it is so important for ageing adults to stay active. Tai Chi is a perfect way to do so because it isn't as hard on the body as other forms of exercise, and it focus heavily on balance. In fact, some Tai Chi movements concentrate solely on maintaining balance for gradually extended periods of time.

Implementing a plan

Getting your patients started on a Tai Chi regiment is easy. Audiologists who have seen the art form make a huge difference in their patients' lives began by introducing them to an initial exercise program. This routine only takes a few minutes to complete, and the goal is to increase activity to around 20 or 30 minutes each session. Believe it or not, regular practice of Tai Chi can reduce falls up to 45%, according to Dr. Peter Wayne, research director of the Osher Center for Integrative Medicine at Brigham and Women's Hospital and Harvard Medical School.

There is one move that has been proven to be more beneficial than others. This maneuver requires the person to stand with their feet together while resting their hands on a table. Then, they take a small step forward and stop when the heel of their front foot touches the floor, leaving the rest of their foot off the ground. They then bring their hands to their chest, rock forward

on the front foot, straighten their hands outward and open them. To complete the move, they then rock back on their heel and push their arms out. To see benefits, this move should be repeated 5 or 6 times before switching to the other leg.

Not sure where to begin? There are plenty of resources online – from studies to instructional videos – you can dig through to help develop a plan for your patients. Or, better yet, you can meet with Tai Chi instructors in your area. Ask them which movements are best for improving balance. At the very least, try to get to know them so you can trust that they'll be a good practitioner to send your patients to for help.

It all starts with an accurate diagnosis

Before you go recommending Tai Chi to patients, you need to assess their balance issues first. At e3, we offer a wide variety of balance assessment tools that can help you accurately diagnose your patients' dizziness issues and get them on a proper treatment plan. Click the button below to browse through our wide assortment of vestibular/balance products, and be sure to reach out to your local e3 office if you have any questions!

About the Author

Adam is the Digital Marketing Coordinator at e3 Diagnostics. His interest in hearing healthcare is driven by his passion for music because he feels everyone should be able to clearly listen to Pet Sounds at least once in their life. In his free time, he enjoys playing video games, digging through record stores for classic vinyl, shooting hoops, and writing stories.