

# **"WALKING WITH SAFETY"**

## **BY GRANDMASTER GARY KHOR**

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We do not tend to think of walking or moving around as particularly dangerous activities and it is certainly true that being physically inactive presents a much greater danger to health. However, you might be surprised to learn that the medical and hospitalisation costs of falls is now \$2 billion dollars per annum and that the federal government is so concerned that it has committed \$6,000,000 to research in to ways of reducing the risk of falls. You might also be surprised to learn that one of the most effective ways of reducing falls risk is practicing Tai Chi. This was proven in scientific research in the USA and Europe. A 15 week course in Tai Chi was demonstrated to reduce the risk of falls by 47%.

To understand both why Tai Chi reduces falls and how you might most effectively reduce the risk of falling we need to consider a number of physical factors that can increase the risk of a person falling such as: stress, weak muscles and poor posture and movement techniques.

Among it's many other problems stress causes tension to be stored in our musculature, mainly in the shoulder and waist area. This results in what is called "excessive postural tension". In effect as our shoulders rise and our waist tightens the body's centre of gravity becomes higher. The higher this is the more we are at risk of falls. Think of how much easier a sports car (with its low centre of gravity) can take a corner than a "double-decker" bus with its high centre of gravity. Another problem with tense shoulders is that the tension that results in the back of the neck causes us to push our head forward (this also throws the spine out of alignment) with the result that our centre of gravity is moved forward making it much easier to fall in that direction. Exercises like shoulder rolling are great at getting tension out but exercises like Tai Chi which attack stress at its root not only remove existing tension but help protect against future tension.



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"Base stability" is another problem often caused by tension. As our waist tightens up we tend to start stepping one foot in front of another. You can test what that does to your balance by placing one foot directly in front of the other and wiggling your hips about. (If you do this make sure that you're in no danger of falling and hurting yourself!). If we walk like this and trip or step on uneven ground we are very vulnerable to falls. Tai Chi stepping techniques teach us to keep the hips open and step forward so that we maintain a shoulder width difference between our feet.

There are many other areas that Tai Chi can help out in. When we step with tension in the lower leg you will find that the pelvis tips making it hard to maintain balance. Weak muscles mean not only that we tend to have a minimal bend in the knees as we walk (which is not good for the knee joints) but that as we step forward the lead foot does not reach the ground until we fall forward onto the foot. Not only are we then at high risk of falling but we are damaging the joints with each impact. Tai Chi tones the musculature allowing proper support and positioning of the leg that allows us to separate out the placement of the foot and the transfer of weight. (In Tai Chi terms we walk like a cat!)

If you want to reduce the risk of falls then learn to relax, tone and co ordinate your musculature, maintain proper spinal alignment, use the joints correctly, separate foot placement and weight transfer... All sound too much? Then why not learn Tai Chi? Many people do just for fun and relaxation things like reduction of falls risk, improvement in breathing, keeping the joints healthy and improving the sense of well being and energy being seen as an added bonus.

**Contact us for details of your nearest specialised program consultant.**  
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