



Tai Chi and related exercise forms

T'ai chi ch'uan (Tai Chi) is a Chinese martial art with many forms. The form used by the Australian Academy of Tai Chi is a soft, rather than hard, martial art and is primarily practised for its health benefits. Unlike many of the other Asian martial arts (wushu, kung fu, kick boxing, judo, etc.), we wear loose, comfortable clothes and flat-soled shoes rather than a distinctive costume or uniform.

Yoga is another ancient exercise form with many variations, some of them quite spiritual. If the Academy's tai chi is a form of moving meditation, then yoga is a static meditation form. While most westerners concentrate on the physical poses, these are only a small part of traditional yoga practice.

Pilates is a much more recent discipline and, like some forms of yoga, is controlled by an international network for training and accreditation. It emphasises natural body flow, incorporating physiotherapy techniques and movement therapies.

European martial arts include fencing, bare-knuckle boxing, wrestling and related gymnastic techniques... again hard and soft forms with differing objectives.

The hard and soft forms obviously are closely related, differing mainly in their goals. The hard forms meet force with force, while the soft forms aim to deflect the attacker's force using minimal effort to put them off balance. The soft forms generally have more utility for older practitioners because of our need to maintain flexibility, balance and movement.

However, exercise is only useful if you do it, any exercise is better than no exercise, and regular exercise is best of all.

Lynn Zelmer, Special Needs Instructor
Australian Academy of Tai Chi