

Tai Chi, Yoga and Pilates

*A guide for people
with heart conditions*



ACPICR

Association of Chartered Physiotherapists
In Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

Tai Chi, Yoga and Pilates are all types of low impact exercise. They focus on controlled movements and breathing techniques and can improve balance, flexibility and core strength.

What are the specific benefits?

- May feel a more comfortable type of exercise as they are low impact on the joints.
- Can be suitable for all abilities from beginner to Intermediate and onto advanced.

Low impact exercise can help improve or maintain...

- Strength..
- Balance
- Psychological well being
- Flexibility
- Posture



When could I start?

It is recommended you attend a cardiovascular rehabilitation programme and inform the team of your wish to do this type of exercise. When you start will depend on your recovery as well as your cardiovascular condition and general health. They can be performed as complementary activities to cardiovascular rehabilitation sessions.

People who have had a heart attack and/or a stent fitted may be able to start quite soon, once assessed by a cardiovascular exercise professional.

People who have had heart surgery may be able to do some low impact exercise fairly soon. To minimise problems with breastbone healing you may be advised to wait before doing certain exercises. For example avoiding leaning through your arms or over stretching shoulders/chest.

How long you wait will depend on your individual cardiovascular surgery centre, but it may be up to 12 weeks post-surgery.

People who have a permanent pacemaker or implantable cardioverter device (ICD) should wait for 6 weeks after the device has been fitted.

How can I get started?

It may be useful to attend cardiovascular rehab sessions and speak to an exercise professional. They can advise which movements are best to start with and how to build up.

If you are new to these activities start by joining a supervised class led by a trained instructor. You can learn the basic techniques and understand the fundamentals first, and once familiar you can start exercising at home. These classes are common in most gym and leisure centres



Stop exercising if you experience any chest pain, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/or GTN spray/tablets seek medical advice as soon as possible.



What about warm up and cool down?

Both a warm up and cool down should always be included in any form of physical activity/exercise. Pilates, Yoga and Tai Chi classes should include warm up and cool down as part of the session.

Remember that the first 15 minutes and last 10 minutes of the session should be performed at a lower intensity, feeling the activity as 'light'.

How should I feel during my session?

Listen to your body and think about how it compares with how you feel in your cardiovascular rehabilitation exercise sessions.

Head down postures and breath holding should be avoided at first as this may cause problems for some people.

You may feel your breathing rate and heart rate have increased but you should still be able to talk in a sentence and able to continue.

Stop exercising if you experience any chest discomfort, palpitations, dizziness or light-headedness. If the symptoms do not go away promptly with rest and/ or your GTN spray or tablets, seek medical advice as soon as possible.



Other things to consider

- Make sure you have taken your medications, as prescribed, prior to exercise.
- Avoid holding your breath. In fact Tai Chi, Yoga and Pilates all promote effective breathing techniques during exercise.
- Try to plan your exercise or pick a routine which doesn't involve frequent changes in position. Some people can feel dizzy going from lying down to standing quickly.
- Don't exercise immediately after eating a large meal.
- Remember to keep hydrated when exercising.
- Assess the temperature of the room. Too hot or too cold may make the exercise more challenging. Hot yoga should be avoided.
- Do not exercise if you feel unwell.
- Tai Chi, Yoga and Pilates are not moderate intensity cardiovascular exercises and therefore shouldn't replace exercise specifically designed to improve or maintain fitness.

This guidance is based on available evidence and expert opinion.

Produced by the Association of Chartered Physiotherapists in Cardiovascular Rehabilitation

This leaflet is not intended to replace the advice that your doctor or cardiovascular rehabilitation team give you based on their expert knowledge of your condition.

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