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Are the 'hard' martial arts, such as the Korean martial art, TaeKwon-Do, of benefit to senior citizens?

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### Abstract

Falls are a leading cause of death in the elderly. Associated with aging is a loss of muscular strength, flexibility, and coordination. Regular exercise is widely believed to be of benefit for the elderly. To this end, various exercise regimes have been employed to battle the associated problems of aging. One such has been the Chinese martial art, Tai Chi Chuan (TC). TC as an exercise system uses slow smooth movements to train the body in balance, endurance, and strength. For this reason, it is known as a 'soft' martial art, in that it is very non-impact oriented. There have been a variety of studies in the West examining the beneficial effects of TC. However, to date, there have been no studies with senior citizens using other martial arts, of which, TC is but one. The present study was designed to examine the appropriateness and effects of a Korean martial art known as TaeKwon-Do (TKD), a 'hard' martial art, on an elderly population measuring

similar parameters reported for TC. Of those participants that attended >85% of classes, an increase was observed in the average number of push-ups, trunk flexion, and balance time on each foot. TKD proved effective at increasing one-leg balance in the population examined. Additionally, the overall dropout rate was extremely low suggesting both that the elderly are capable of participating in a hard martial art and that they have an interest in it as a viable alternative to other forms of exercise. The present study suggests that TKD as a form of exercise for an elderly population is both viable and potentially popular and warrants further study.



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