



ENCOURAGING HEALTHY AGING BY PREVENTING FALLS

235

older adults participated in the A Matter of Balance falls prevention program.

275

older adults participated in the Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention program.

PRIORITY

A R E A S

- Helping older adults increase their confidence, strength and balance.
- Reducing participants' fear, pain and falls.
- Educating health care providers about how our programs can benefit their patients.
- Training falls prevention instructors.
- Partnering with community organizations to promote programming.

IMPACTS

Participants in evidence-based falls prevention programming such as A Matter of Balance and Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention increased their knowledge of falls prevention strategies and increased their ratings of their own general health. According to 2019 data from the Administration for Community Living (part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services), of the participants surveyed after completing MSU Extension falls prevention programming:



82%

reported the program reduced their fear of falling.



88%

said they either improved or continued the measures they take for reducing falls.



90%

said their ratings of their own general health either stayed the same or increased.

To support falls prevention programming, contact Cheryl Eschbach at cheryl@msu.edu. To bring falls prevention programming to your community, contact Dawn Contreras at contrer7@msu.edu.

“The movements are so relaxing and make your muscles feel so much better. Like the backs of your legs — you just don’t do things every day where you use those muscles. But just to stand and do the exercises makes your body feel so much better. I feel more relaxed after I’ve done a session than I would just walking around the house.”

• Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention program participant



TAI CHI FOR ARTHRITIS & FALLS PREVENTION

Unfortunately, 1 in 4 adults aged 65 or older will report a fall this year, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Falls and the fear of falling can be devastating, but they are preventable. To help Michigan's older adults gain more confidence to stay active and reduce their fear of falls, Michigan State University Extension offers the Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention program.

This evidence-based falls prevention program combines slow physical movements with mindfulness to achieve better agility, balance and muscle control. The program has been found to improve muscle function in lower limbs, increase confidence in walking, and reduce stress, pain and falls. The program involves 16 hours of progressive instruction.

Tai chi offers a multitude of health benefits. It has been shown to reduce the physical effects of stress, reduce bone loss, increase strength, improve balance and stability, and reduce chronic pain. Tai chi has even been shown to speed recovery time from health problems like strokes and heart attacks.

For participant Diane Hyer of Marquette County, the program has done all that and more. Along with her husband, Jim, the 77-year-old Skandia resident has been taking tai chi classes for the past few years. In fall 2019, they took classes through their local Marquette County MSU Extension office.

Diane credits tai chi with helping her and Jim recover and rehab after heart attacks suffered just months apart. Even more, she credits the exercises she learned through tai chi with helping her get up after a scary fall in her kitchen while she was alone.



Photo courtesy of Diane Hyer

"I would say balance has improved by 90 percent, both for Jim and me. We've done really well since the classes started in September," she said.

For participants like Diane and Jim, the Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention program can not only lead to healthier living and a lower risk of falls, it can lead to an increased sense of confidence.

"Both of us feel safer and stronger," Diane said.

Read more about Diane and Jim's experience on our website at canr.msu.edu/tai-chi-for-arthritis

A MATTER OF BALANCE

In Michigan and across the country, falls are the primary cause of injuries and injury-related deaths among older adults. Deaths due to unintentional falls rose from nearly 41% of all deaths in Michigan's older adults in 2009 to 47% in 2014, according to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services.

The A Matter of Balance program is designed to reduce the fear of falling and increase activity levels among older adults. Class sizes of eight to 12 participants allow for peer-to-peer group discussions. The program includes eight 2-hour small-group sessions led by a trained facilitator.

During the class, participants learn a variety of skills that help them view falls as controllable. They set goals for increasing activity, making changes to reduce fall risks at home, and exercising to increase their strength and balance. The class is best suited for people who are concerned about falling, have restricted activities because of fall concerns, have fallen in the past, or are interested in increasing their balance, flexibility and strength.





A MATTER OF BALANCE COACH TRAINING

In 2019, MSU Extension’s master trainers taught 28 new coaches to lead A Matter of Balance classes in their communities. The new coaches include people who work for or in senior centers, commissions on aging, the Retired Senior Volunteer Program, health centers, service clubs, health systems, trauma centers, gyms and veterans homes. Caregivers, health care providers, medical students and people who provide services to older adults were also trained as coaches.

If you’re interested in becoming a falls prevention coach in your community, contact Bree Carlson at bree@msu.edu.

PARTNERING TO PREVENT FALLS

In 2019, MSU Extension established partnerships with firefighters and other first responders, optometrists, staff members and volunteers at senior centers, health care providers, physicians, medical residents, insurers and other local organizations to refer people to falls prevention programming.

The partnerships help create a sustainable referral network connecting agencies and organizations working with older residents through a range of community resources. For example, MSU Extension staff members trained senior services manager Maureen McFadden, senior services manager with the Marquette Senior Center, as a falls prevention coach. Consequently, the center now plans to offer evidence-based falls prevention programs four times a year.

“As a senior provider in a rural community I feel like being trained to facilitate A Matter of Balance has been a crucial asset to the people we serve. It’s simple; older adults just want one thing – to maintain their independence as long as possible while having a good quality of life. The A Matter of Balance program is an integral tool to make this goal a reality, and I am honored to be a part of that reality.”

— Maureen McFadden, senior services manager,
Marquette Senior Center

RAISING AWARENESS OF FALLS PREVENTION

MSU Extension encouraged its falls prevention partners to participate in Falls Prevention Awareness Day (September 23, 2019). Activities included:

- Environment and room simulators that showed visitors how to identify and reduce the risks posed by trip hazards.
- Presentations about fall risks posed by medications, balance issues and blood pressure changes.
- Demonstrations of falls prevention programs.

“We would like to express our appreciation for [MSU Extension’s] role in [the] D.J. Jacobetti Home for Veterans’ Falls Prevention Day and providing a great tai chi presentation for members. We are excited to get staff trained and continue this activity to benefit members. At D.J. Jacobetti Home for Veterans, we could not do what we do without the caring support of our community. Your support helps make our work possible. We strongly believe our veterans deserve the best. Through your assistance, that’s precisely what they receive.”

— D.J. Jacobetti Home for Veterans, Marquette

28 Coaches trained for A Matter of Balance

37 Instructors trained for Tai Chi for Arthritis and Fall Prevention.

“Tai chi has given me a positive all-over body experience and workout with my balance, posture and deep breathing.”

• Tai Chi for Arthritis and Falls Prevention participant

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