



The Overlooked Benefits of Martial Arts

When considering a physical activity for yourself or a family member with a bleeding disorder, many overlook the possibility of martial arts. Martial arts can be defined as any of the traditional forms of oriental self-defense that utilizes physical skill and coordination without weapons, such as karate, aikido, judo, jiu-jitsu or kung fu, often practiced as a sport.

Martial arts are often depicted as high contact, high intensity activities. While there are certain forms of martial arts that do use sparring and contact, many do not. When looking for a program, it is important to do your homework and ask the right questions to know what style of martial arts is right for you.

Martial arts should be considered for their many benefits beyond building

muscle tone, flexibility, and general health. The practice of martial arts also builds emotional health. Some of the biggest benefits that come from practicing any of the martial arts are self-esteem and self-confidence, self-control, responsibility, respect, and most importantly fun!

Many in the bleeding disorders community are finding success practicing the art of tai chi.

Tai chi is a practice originating from Chinese martial arts and traditional Chinese medicine. It involves a series of slow, meditative body movements that were originally designed for self-defense to promote inner peace and calm.

Tai chi can increase flexibility, strengthen muscles & tendons, aid in the treatment of heart disease, high blood pressure, arthritis, digestive disorders, skin diseases, depression, cancer, and many other illnesses. Research has also shown that tai chi helps to improve balance and prevent falls. Because tai chi movements are slow and deliberate with shifts of body weight from one leg to the other in coordination with upper body movements, it challenges balance. This technique improves balance and reduces fall frequency which is key, especially for older adults with bleeding disorders.

Whether the choice is tai chi, taekwondo, some other form of martial art, or any other sport, we encourage you to do your research to find a qualified instructor and a program that is safe and right for your needs. As always, consult with your physician, physical therapist, or HTC before beginning any physical activity or exercise program.

BENEFITS OF TAI CHI

- **Movements are low-impact and gentle, putting minimal stress on your muscles and joints.**
- **The risk of injury is very low.**
- **You can do it anywhere, anytime, and at your own pace.**
- **It requires very little space and no special clothing or equipment.**
- **It is non-competitive.**
- **There are lots of movements to keep you interested, and as you become more accomplished you can add those to your routine.**



“My pain is gone. My high blood pressure that lead to my heart attack, resolved. Flexibility and strength, greatly improved. My braces? They now sit in the closet, collecting dust; I no longer need them, though I do occasionally look at them to remind myself of where I was. Most importantly, I experience fewer bleeds.”

– Rick Starks, 59, Hemophilia B, certified instructor and practitioner of tai chi.

“Our son began Taekwondo when he was in Kindergarten, and over the years has gained confidence and understanding of his body, and has experienced less bleeds.

Martial arts was the right decision for us.”

– Kimberly, HFA Executive Director and mom of a 12 year-old with hemophilia

Questions to Consider Before Enrolling in Martial Arts:



What medical training does the staff have?
(i.e. CPR, bloodborne safety, first aid, etc.)



What overall training does the staff have?

- i. Who did this person learn from?
- ii. How long did he or she study with this person?
- iii. How long has he/she practiced this art?
- iv. Does the teacher have any experience as a teacher, or is he or she simply a skilled martial artist? Just like great football players can make bad coaches (and vice versa), great martial artists are not necessarily great teachers.



Can I sit down with the staff before starting to educate the instructor(s) about my child's bleeding disorder?



Is there physical contact; student to student, student to staff?



How do you avoid getting hurt practicing martial arts? Is there protective equipment?



Is there physical contact with breaking boards or other items?



What is the cost of the classes/equipment?



How could you accommodate/include my child if he has a bleed? What about pro-rating tuition if my child is unable to attend for a majority of a month?



Can I stay to watch my child?



Are there certain forms of martial arts that are safer than others?



At what age can my child begin taking classes?



Am I able to observe a class or two before committing to the classes? ■■

*While extensive efforts are made to ensure accuracy of the content of each FitFactor article, these entries are not intended to be construed as medical advice or the official opinion/position of HFA, its staff, or its board of directors. Readers are strongly encouraged to discuss their own medical treatment, diet plan, and physical activities with their healthcare providers.

“Brazilian jiu-jitsu is the best form of martial arts for people with hemophilia.

It builds muscle strength and provides cardiovascular fitness, and is one sport where you can give 110%.”

– *Darian Ross, 18, severe Hemophilia A, has practiced the art of Brazilian jiu-jitsu for 2 years.*



“I wouldn't be who I am today if it wasn't for Martial Arts. I am stronger, healthier, and more confident because of practicing this sport for the past 15 years.”

– *Anthony Pezzillo, moderate Hemophilia A, Taekwondo instructor and 3rd degree black belt.*

“Taekwondo was the best thing I ever did for my health!”



– *Jeff Kallberg, PT, severe Hemophilia A, black belt in Taekwondo, trains in various martial arts.*