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Caregiver Thought Leader Interview: Peter Newton • August 12, 2015

EDITOR'S PEN

Gary Barg, Editor-in-Chief

Caregiver Thought Leader Interview: Peter Newton

Peter Newton is an honorary vice president at Tai Chi Union for Great Britain. He's also a Tai Chi Sefu or master teacher. Peter specializes in remedial therapy, which is based on extensive research and training in the medical application of Tai Chi and Qi Gong. His 20-plus years of experience as a Tai Chi and Qi Gong teacher and a practicing therapist with Parkinson's UK Kickstart Cardiac Rehabilitation, McMillan's Cancer Support and Leonard Cheshire Acquired Brain Injury Unit testify to Peter's experience and expertise. His skills have attracted the attention of international footballers, the medical care profession and the business world, and he's also author of the new book [Health and Fit with Tai Chi: Perfect Your Posture, Balance and Breathing](#).

Gary Barg: Peter, let's start at the beginning. What is Tai Chi?

Peter Newton: Tai Chi, originally, was practiced as a martial art that worked extensively on improving your posture to get the best out of your body. Chinese experts would make sure the posture was correct so that the body mechanics would create power and that power could be used then to defend or attack if necessary.

Gary Barg: What are the health benefits of learning Tai Chi?

Peter Newton: What's happened over the centuries is that how you move in Tai Chi, how you stand, how you squat down, how you lift the body up, you

coordinate that with breathing and with motion. And, the benefits now that are coming through are quite clear. It massively improves your circulation, and regulates your blood pressure and breathing. It teaches you how to return back to natural breathing. It strengthens your body mechanics and makes you move correctly through your joints, and the list goes on and on.

Gary Barg: So, is it an important exercise for us to learn as we age?

Peter Newton: Especially so. As we age, the body naturally degenerates, but practicing your Tai Chi and your Qi Gong exercises as part of your everyday life is in a way a semi-antidote you can apply to the body to extend the physical potential. You'll find that as you're getting older, your disks will degenerate and you lose height, but the disks won't degenerate as much if you practice your daily Tai Chi. For example, I'm just turning 60 now and in fact, I've gone up in height since I took up Tai Chi. Bare feet, I'm just under 6'4, but I was 6'2 ½ bare feet when I started in my early 20s. All my friends and everybody around me who don't practice Tai Chi, they're all shrinking before my very eyes.

Gary Barg: Why is it important to be cognizant of our breathing?

Peter Newton: The breathing is the fuel of life. It's the first thing you do when you're born, it's the last thing you do when you die. So, it's the very first thing you should look at in trying to get your health in good order. Breathing is absolutely essential and I am like a voice in the wilderness shouting out to everybody, "Don't you realize what you're doing?"

Gary Barg: What tips do you have for us in the book about helping our breathing, helping our posture, helping our balance, even before we start practicing Tai Chi?

Peter Newton: There are certain fundamentals that you can do immediately. The ancient Chinese say walk long, they say sit long, they say stand long and move long. What they mean is to always keep your body extended. What we tend to do is sit crumpled, sit short, walk short, move short, stand short. And if you can equate that to life expectancy, then what's happening is that people who live the shortness in their body tend to live shorter lives. The long, those who stretch out live long, breathe long, walk long, they're the ones who extend their lifespan. So, the fundamental thing is make sure you extend your body upwards and open the joints of your spine so that you're not slumped at any time.

Gary Barg: Why did you write this book?

Peter Newton: I wrote the book, because I've got this yearning in me to get

the message around the planet that we need to be doing more for ourselves. Basically because people don't spend enough time to learn about this amazing machine we live in, the human body. All you have to do is tap in to this incredible power that's in there, and the contentment that it gives you in your life is something that is worthwhile pursuing. Chinese call it Sung, S-u-n-g, a state of Sung is the desired state. And, that's what we in the Western world would call somebody who's very contented in their life, happy in their skin. There is another way. And, the other way is, instead of passing responsibility over to your doctor, if you have a problem, you solve it yourself first. Have a look at yourself, learn about your body, and then involve your doctor with it. There's lots of little things that happen in the body that you can resolve yourself without it turning into something serious as in frozen shoulder. For example, Lots of people over here have got frozen shoulder, because they're frightened to death to move their shoulders.

Gary Barg: What would the one most important piece of advice you'd like to share with family caregivers be?

Peter Newton: A sick caregiver can't look after somebody who's sick, so the caregivers must be looking after themselves. First thing you have to look at is your posture, your breathing, and then your stress levels. You need to get those three things working in that order. If you get your posture right, your breathing will come right. When you're breathing and your posture are right, your stress levels will drop. During my demonstrations, I usually call one or two people out in the audience and looking at someone's posture, I told an attendee that her posture was restricting her diaphragm, and causing digestion trouble. And, she said, "I always have digestion trouble." And, incidentally, at the end of the session, the attendees formed an orderly line and the entire crew bought my book and DVD. So, it certainly did touch a nerve with them.

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