

## Ai Chi

Participants stand in shoulder deep, warm water to practice Ai Chi. Ai Chi includes 19 continuous gentle, slow and broad movements. Like Tai Chi practitioners you may see in the park, Ai Chi focuses on breathing, upper limb movement, trunk stability, lower limb movement, balance and coordinated total body movements.

Indoor, warm pool Ai Chi participants wear a bathing suit. Outdoor, warm pool Ai Chi participants are encouraged to keep warm and may wish to add a long sleeve water shirt, water tights and a knit cap. Those who require extra warmth may wish to wear a neoprene vest. Water shoes are highly encouraged for those with diabetes and peripheral neuropathy. Ai Chi participants are encouraged to stay hydrated and bring water to class, or pre-hydrate before class. Wear sandals or water shoes to protect your feet on public decks and in locker rooms.

Ai Chi has elements of both Qi Gong and Tai Chi Chuan. It is an active relaxation technique in which postural control and breathing are important. Research has shown that Ai Chi reduces stress. Tai Chi is used successfully to increase the ability to balance and reduces fall risk. Ai Chi has the same effects.

Working in water has benefits over exercising on land. When people are safe (and feel safe), they are able to make larger movements than on land without the risk of losing their balance. This leads to empowerment, self-confidence and to improving activities of daily living.

- Ai Chi gets your body moving, increases your energy, and promotes flexibility and strength.
- Ai Chi can help reduce muscle weakness and widespread chronic pain, as well as joint stiffness.
- The warm water allows for slow, relaxed movement and increased blood flow to joints, tendons, muscles and ligaments.
- It can also minimize problems associated with conditions such as polymyalgia rheumatica, and rheumatoid and psoriatic arthritis.
- Ai Chi requires no equipment, and allows the hair and face to stay dry, which can be very helpful for non-swimmers who would benefit from exercise in the water.

Overall: Ai Chi is excellent for maintaining/improving balance, decreasing pain, extending joint mobility, improving systemic issues (blood pressure, heart rate, oxygen delivery, etc.)

In terms of mental health, Ai Chi can minimize problems such as:

- Anxiety
- Fatigue
- Depression
- Stress

### **Jun Konno - The Creator of Ai Chi**

Jun Konno, was one of Japan's foremost swimming and fitness consultants and the President of Aqua Dynamics Institute (the Japanese chapter of Aquatic Exercise Association - AEA).

In 1986, Jun Konno, ATRIC, began to promote aquatics in Japan and became the Chairman of the Executive Committee for Japan's National Aquatic Conference. He later met Harold Dull (creator of Watsu) and witnessed Watsu for himself. Jun Konno was intrigued by the concept of coordinating breath with movement.

He then created Ai Chi, incorporating Watsu principles, elements of Tai Chi and Gigong, and the benefits of exercise in warm water.

The name "Ai Chi" was inspired by Kunno's daughter whose name was "Ai" (which means love in Japanese) and "Chi" (which refers to the Asian philosophy that circulating life energy is present in all things).

In the mid-1990s, Jun Konno reached out to Ruth Sova, MS, president of ATRI and founder of the AEA, to help him spread the word of Ai Chi globally. Together they published Ai Chi: Balance, Harmony & Healing in 1999 and developed a certification program that continues to this day.

Jun Konno passed away in June of 2021.