

Heal Yourself with Qi Gong

By Shanthi Jessa

What was once a secretive practice passed down by masters is now easily available and can be enjoyed by everyone today. Like any other practice, to reap the benefits of Qi Gong, one has to be persistent and consistent. Only then will you begin to feel the health benefits of the exercises.

What is Qi Gong?

Qi (pronounced as “chee”, as in cheese) is the life-force energy of the body which is responsible for our vitality. *Gong* means work or skill. Qi gong is therefore the practice of cultivating, restoring and circulating vital life-force energy in the body to create a balance. Qi Gong is composed of three essential components: (1) physical exercises, with emphasis on proper posture and alignment; (2) deep, abdominal breathing; and (3) meditation and visualization, both of which are considered practitioner’s “mental intention.” This ancient health and healing art has a time-tested history of producing health, healing and youthfulness, as far back as 4,500 years.

We are all familiar with the martial arts aspect of Qi Gong. We have seen marital artists such as Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee demonstrate extraordinary skills and abilities because they developed an understanding of how to use the power of chi. However, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Medical Qi Gong is the cultivation of energy specifically to preserve and restore health. It consists of techniques that relax and integrate the mind and body and strengthen the body’s tissues and organ functions. It promotes flexibility, stability, and mobility. It is a self-healing therapy that gives the practitioner a greater degree of control over the aging process. Qi Gong practices have been linked to improved circulation, reduced stress, lowered blood pressure, reduced chronic pain, and improved immune function (Sancier 1996b).

Proper posture allows the body’s energy to flow more freely through the body. Proper breathing calms the nervous system while providing the body’s cells with more oxygen to use as fuel. Visualization (guided intention) involves using the mind’s eye to direct the flow of energy to a specific part of the body, such as the organs of the digestive system for improved digestion. Within the human body, chi is said to have many major functions: it protects the body from disease, supports and sustains all movements, supports the body’s transformation, retains fundamental substance, and maintains normal body heat.

Wuji Posture: How to Stand

The Wuji posture is the foundation for all *dynamic* (moving) and *quiescent* (static) standing exercises. This posture maximizes relaxation and the flow of chi.

1. Stand with your feet shoulder width apart, feet facing forward and flat on the ground, your weight evenly distributed through the feet.
2. Your knees should be slightly bent and facing the same direction as the knee. Never bend your knees past the toes. Try to align your knees directly over your toes. Relaxing the knee joints increases the chi and blood flow through the legs.
3. Tilt your sacrum to relax your lower back. Your tailbone (coccyx) should be facing down toward the ground. Keep your upper body straight.

4. Relax your chest and arms. Your shoulders should be gently pulled back and then down, without puffing out your chest. When your chest and back are without tension, your heart and lungs are able to function more efficiently, and circulation of both chi and blood are improved.
5. Suspend your head and tuck in your chin. Visualize your body as if it were suspended by a string connected to the crown or top of your head. This will elongate your spine. Slightly tucking in your chin and stacking your vertebrae on top of one another will facilitate chi and blood flow through your spine and brain. Feel your spine elongate with each breath. Check each part of your body to ensure that all your muscles are relaxed.
6. Arms slightly out as if you are holding a golf ball under your armpit. Elbows slightly bent to facilitate the flow of chi.

Fire Path Qi Gong Breathing: How to Breathe

Stand in *wuji* posture or sit comfortably at the edge of a chair. Breathe only through your nose and keep your mouth closed.

1. Place your thumbs on your navel. This will place your hands over your lower abdominal area (lower dan tien).
2. Place the tip of your tongue behind your front teeth. Be sure your tongue is also touching the roof of your mouth.
3. Inhale through your nose. Lead the breath up your spine (Governing Vessel); push your belly out to pull breath into the bottom of your lungs. Your chest should barely move. The breath should take you at least 6 seconds.
4. Gently hold for 2 seconds.
5. Drop the tongue and exhale through the nose and pull your belly in. This should take 6 seconds.
6. Follow the breath down the front of the body (Conception Vessel).

Instant Energy Booster

Daily stress and tension, lack of sleep, emotional upset, or chronic pain may all be conditions that cause blockages in the flow of chi. Chinese medicine calls this state a *chi stagnation*. In such instances, your energy is not low; it is blocked. By moving the chi you have already helped boost your energy levels tremendously.

Try this simple exercise to boost your energy level and increase mental focus and physical well-being. It will get your chi and blood moving to revitalize your body for a quick energetic pick-me-up; a perfect substitute for caffeine or sugar!

Stretch and Support the Sky: To Energize Your Whole Body and Relax Muscle Tension

Stretch and Support the Sky is a perfect pick-me-up. It gets your blood flowing while stretching your muscles and meridians. (Meridians are energy “high-ways” or channels that conduct energy to and from different areas of your body.) This is also the exercise of choice if you sit in front of a computer all day and suffer from neck, shoulder, or wrist tension. Stretching your arms upward gives your lungs more room to take bigger breaths, which means more oxygen is provided as fuel for your body’s cells. It also regulates “san jiao” (Triple Burner): respiration, digestion, and elimination.

1. Stand in *wuji* posture. (You can also do this while sitting, but your lower body will miss the stretch it receives when you stand.)

2. Place the back of your hands on top of your head with palms facing the sky and the fingertips of both hands pointing toward each other.
3. Inhale into your belly.
4. Exhale and stretch your arms directly up above your head; at the same time raise your heels to stretch your legs. Keep your palms parallel to the ceiling as you stretch upward until your elbows and knees are no longer bending.
5. Inhale and lower your arms back to the starting position, simultaneously coming back down to flat feet on the ground.
6. Inhale, raise your arms directly over your head while raising your heels. Stretch and elongate your entire body. Keep your head facing forward.
7. Exhale, lower your arms, and come back down onto your feet.
8. Repeat at least 9 times, if you can; fewer if you can't.

You may find that your shoulders are too tight to raise your palms directly over your head. Don't push to make this happen. Instead, if you practice this exercise for five minutes, once or twice a day, you will notice your shoulders and neck will become more flexible and strong. Be sure to relax your neck and shoulders. The gentle stretch in the wrists helps to prevent repetitive stress injuries from computer work. Remember, being persistent and consistent in your practice will bring about the results you desire.

Shanthi Jessa is a certified Medical Qi Gong Instructor who provides private/public classes, in-person or via Skype sessions. She can be contacted by cell: 832-283-1563 or email: snjessa@gmail.com.

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