

QiGong

For centuries, people in China have been using ancient knowledge of energy and laws of the universe to enhance health. Acupuncture, Traditional Chinese Medicine and Tai Chi are now familiar words in the West, but Qigong is less well known. This article will explore how Qigong can help us in today's hectic world.

Qigong (pronounced 'Chi Kung') is a mind-body exercise that utilises Qi (lifeforce/energy). Whereas its relatives Tai Chi and Kung Fu developed a defence or fighting focus, Qigong has maintained an internal focus, aiming to improve human health, and ultimately to develop humanity to a higher level.

Qi – lifeforce/energy

A closer look at the meaning of the word Qigong can give an insight into how simple Qigong exercises can have such a profound effect.

Qi is the building block of everything in the universe. From the smallest particle to the largest planet, everything is composed of this fundamental energy, which is constantly transforming and changing.

From a Qigong perspective, a person is seen as being made up of the physical body (Jing), Qi (energy) and mind/consciousness (Shen). These 'Three Treasures of Man' all work together, with the mind holding the role of leader in the relationship. Where the mind goes, Qi follows. How we think, what we think and the state of our mind all affect the state of our Qi, and the quality and quantity of our Qi affects the health of our physical body.

When this relationship between mind, body and Qi is understood, it can be seen how dis-ease creates disease. As the classic text of Chinese Medicine, the Yellow Emperor's Internal Medicine written in (approximately) 300 BC states, "Be relaxed, calm and natural. If you live according to this principle, your pure Qi will continually flow in abundance and with vigour. When the mind is harmonious, abiding inward, where can illness come from?"

Gong – work, cultivation

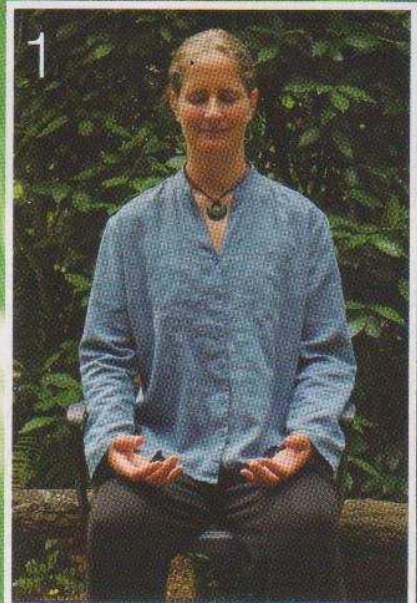
By using work on the consciousness, breathing and physical body as major techniques, Qigong practice brings the consciousness inward in an active, positive way. The mind, body and Qi are unified as a whole, and being whole is the root of healing. (Heal = whole)

The movements and the mind gather and draw pure Qi into the body, transforming and dispersing old Qi and information, and promoting the smooth flow of Qi through the channels.

With roots in Daoism, Buddhism and martial arts, thousands of forms of Qigong have evolved over the last 5000 years, with the exercises often being secretly passed down from father to son. Zhineng Qigong has taken the essence of traditional forms to create a highly-researched system which has been well-documented in being beneficial for treating a wide range of illnesses, and improving general health.

Indeed, Qigong lifts the standard of good health and expands it to the whole of life. Fulfilling one's potential, developing wisdom and special abilities of consciousness and helping others to uplift their lives can all flow on from the practice.

Estimated to be 5,000 years old QiGong is the foundation for both acupuncture and T'ai Ch'i. QiGong is practiced by over 80 million people each day.



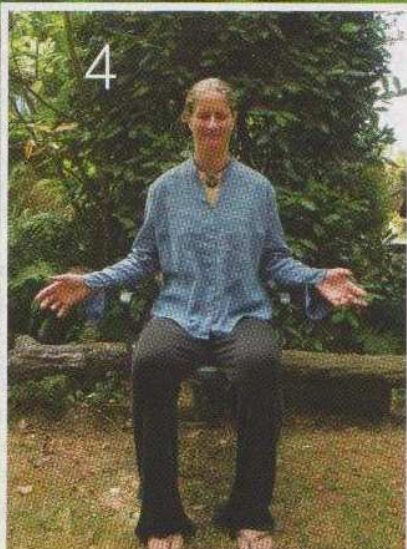
Sit in a comfortable position and relax. Close your eyes and draw your mind into your body. Relax your whole body and visualise it is empty. Imagine your head is in the sky and your feet are deep in the earth. Expand your mind out to fill the whole universe, and think of pure, powerful Qi. Think inside your body again, drawing your mind and Qi deep inside.



Raise your hands up in front of the belly button, as if you are holding a ball in your hands, with your fingers close to each other but not touching.



3 Use your elbows to pull your hands about 10cm apart, then close them together again, very close but not touching. As you open out, think far out in the universe. When you close in, think of the space between your hands. Visualise that it is very bright and Qi is gathering there. Repeat as many times as you like.



4 To end, relax your hands out to the sides. At waist height, turn your palms forwards and visualise drawing a big ball of Qi back around your body.



5 Send the Qi into the centre of your abdomen and overlap your palms on your belly button; men left hand in first and women right hand first.

Health Improvements from QiGong

Health coach Jackie Blunt came to Zhineng Qigong seven years ago in Motueka, looking for a way to heal her arthritis and fatigue. "I now have free moving and supple joints. I no longer have arthritis in any of my limb joints and my chronic back pain from childhood is a thing of the past," she said.

Good health is but one of the benefits of Qigong practice, as Jackie found out. "Overall my life has deepened and brightened immeasurably – I have recovered my joie de vivre!", she says. Along with better memory and concentration, she has found her ability to stay relaxed and think clearly in stressful situations has improved. As a mother of three, Jackie has also noticed the effect of her practice on family life. "We have a lot more fun together and everyone's lives have improved, even just with one person practising and working on themselves on a daily basis."

Ollie Clifton, a Project Manager from Christchurch, wasn't really sure if Qigong was for him when he started practising. "I mean, I wasn't sick, so why should I bother?", he says. However, Qigong has helped him redefine what it really means to be healthy. "My physical health has gone from strength to strength since I started practising consistently. My mind is much more still and clear, and as I continue to develop my practice, I seem to have greater control over my life."

Top Tips to Protect Your Qi

There are many things you can do throughout the day to look after your Qi:

1) Be calm! A calm mind leads to calm Qi and a healthy body. A busy mind – full of uncontrolled thoughts, attachments and worries – disturbs Qi and affects the body. The first step to being calm is to learn to be focused – turn a thousand thoughts into one with Qigong practice, and extend that into everyday life by focusing on one part of your body. For example, can you keep your mind on the soles of

your feet as you walk? Can you keep your mind in your abdomen with every breath?

2) Relax! Being relaxed helps your Qi flow smoothly, so check you are physically and mentally relaxed. Feel your shoulders: are they tense and lifted up? Take a breath and r – e – l – a – x.

3) Smile! Joy benefits heart Qi ...so relax, smile, enjoy (be in joy) ... and know that 'everything is good!'

4) Be emotionally stable. Emotions deplete Qi at the deep level of the organs. For example, anger affects the liver; sadness – lungs; fear – kidneys; worry – spleen; overjoy – heart. So if something's getting on your nerves...STOP! Return to a good state of mind (doing some Qigong helps!) then look at the real cause behind your emotion and work on resolving it.

5) Think positively! Our minds are like powerful super computers sending out information that causes Qi to change inside and out. So accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative...for the sake of yourself, other people and everything in the universe!

6) Keep a healthy routine and lifestyle. Early to bed, early to rise does indeed keep a person healthy, wealthy in Qi and wise.

7) Exercise in moderation. Extreme physical exercise depletes kidney Qi, which is an important base of your Qi for life. So how about doing a nourishing exercise like Qigong instead?

8) Keep warm. Your Qi needs to fight against cold to keep you warm, so a simple way to protect your Qi is to put on another layer.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Vanessa Lukes is a Yuan Tze Ren Xue Qigong Master and Qi therapist. Based in Christchurch, she teaches Zhineng Qigong and also does Qi healing.

www.chigong.co.nz