

What is Qigong?

by *Kenneth Cohen*

Qigong (also spelled Ch'i Kung) is a powerful system of healing and energy medicine from China. It is the art and science of using breathing techniques, gentle movement, and meditation to cleanse, strengthen, and circulate the life energy (qi). Qigong practice leads to better health and vitality and a tranquil state of mind. In the past, qigong was also called nei gong (inner work) and dao yin (guiding energy).

How do I say it?

Qi pronounce chee

Gong pronounce gung, as in lung

How old is Qigong?

The documented history of qigong goes back approximately 2,500 years. However Chinese archaeologists and historians have found references to qigong-like techniques at least five thousand years old.

What about Taiji Quan (Tai Chi)?

Taiji Quan is a style of qigong. It is graceful, relaxed, slow, and fluid, like a slow-motion dance. Unlike some qigong methods that exercise specific systems or parts of the body-- nervous system, endocrine system, heart, kidneys-- Taiji Quan is a whole body, whole mind exercise. It treats health systemically, restoring the body to its original "program", uncorrupted by stress, pollution, and disease. The Qigong Research & Practice Center offers training in all aspects and levels of Taiji Quan.

Who can benefit?

Qigong is practiced by more than 80 million Chinese people and probably by tens of thousands in the United States and Europe. Qigong has been rigorously tested in controlled scientific experiments and clinical trials and is often used as an adjunct to conventional allopathic medical treatment. Hypertensive patients who take medication and practice qigong fare better than controls who only take the medication. Similarly, there is solid evidence that qigong can improve immune function and mental health, and prevent disabilities that come with age. Qigong acts like Vitamin C, increasing the activity of an enzyme that helps to deactivate free radicals, highly reactive chemicals that promote tissue degeneration and loss of memory. In 1995 the Journal of the American Medical Association published evidence that Taiji Quan, a form of qigong, is effective at preventing loss of balance and falling injuries among the elderly. Researchers at Johns Hopkins School of Medicine confirm that Taiji Quan works like aerobics at reducing high blood pressure.

Because qigong includes both dynamic and gentle techniques that can be practiced from standing, seated, or supine postures, it is suitable for young and old. Practices can be tailored to individual needs making it an ideal aid to recovery from illness or injury. Qigong is a form of complementary medicine. It works well with other forms of therapy and should never be used as a substitute for necessary treatment by a physician.

Is Qigong scientific?

Both China and the U.S. have hosted conferences for academic exchange of qigong research. Qigong has been shown to improve posture and respiration, induce the relaxation response, cause favorable changes in blood chemistry, and improve self-awareness and concentration. Research suggests that Qigong may be beneficial for Asthma, Arthritis, Cancer, Cardiovascular Disease, Chronic Fatigue, Fibromyalgia, Headaches, Pain, and a wide variety of common ailments. External Qi Healing is effective for the same range of illnesses as acupuncture.

Benefits of Self-Healing Qigong

Experimental evidence suggests the following healing effects of qigong exercises and meditations.

- **Cardiovascular**
lower resting heart rate; normalized EKG, blood pressure, and cholesterol levels
- **Respiratory**
slower respiratory rate, improves gaseous exchange, significant benefits for asthma & bronchitis
- **Immune System**
better targeting of antigens, significant anti-cancer effect
- **Circulation**
improves microcirculation, prevents vascular spasms, very helpful for angina, migraine, and Reynaud's Syndrome (cold hands & feet)
- **Brain**
improves cerebral blood flow, less incidence of stroke; reduction in frequency and intensity of seizure disorders; slow, high amplitude brainwaves suggest relaxed and integrated state of consciousness
- **Musculoskeletal**
improves posture, balance, strength, stamina, flexibility
- **Chronic Pain**
significant pain reduction from all causes, including injury, surgery, arthritis, fibromyalgia
- **Mental Health**
decreases: stress response, Type A, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive, depression. Improves memory and interpersonal sensitivity
- **Longevity**
improves: blood pressure, vital capacity, cholesterol and hormone levels, kidney function, mental acuity, vision and hearing, skin elasticity, bone density, immune function, digestion, balance, flexibility, strength, libido