



Institut QiShen Institute

Tai Chi & Qigong

氣功

INTRODUCTION TO QIGONG

In Chinese, the word “Qigong” is comprised of two words. Qi (pronounced “tchee”), the life energy inside a person, circulates throughout the body performing many functions to maintain good health. Gong (pronounced “kung”) is a method of exercise in this context.

Qigong is thus an exercise which cultivates better and stronger Qi. The stronger Qi you have, the healthier and stronger you are. Qigong is especially beneficial for health and mental relaxation.

Qigong is a form of exercise comprised of slow movements synchronized with deep and slow breathing.

The Qigong exercises proposed in this document constitute an introduction to the wonderful Chinese art of energy conservation. It is recommended to do warm up exercises before beginning your Qigong exercises, particularly for the knees that will be supporting most of your body weight. Some of the proposed exercises are stationary, others include arm movements. There is no moving around. These Qigong exercises can be done in a standing position, while sitting down, or even laying down.

Qigong and Practice Location

In order to achieve a state of greater relaxation, it is recommended to practice Qigong in a peaceful and serene location. Preferably, that location will be outside to benefit from the fresh air, in a park for example. Obviously, the weather must be appropriate with temperature neither too hot nor too cold. On a rainy day or if it starts to rain, choose a location where you can be protected from the rain while still outside. On a bright and sunny day, it could be best to practice in the shade. If you can't practice in the outdoors, try to create a suitably calm ambiance. For example, by shading the lights, lighting candles and putting on music suitable to relaxation. Also, make sure to turn down the phone ring level, and if you have an answering machine or answering service, why not turn it off for the time of your practice.

Qigong and Breathing

Breathing is at the heart of Qigong. It must be done slowly and must be deep. To maximize the benefits of Qigong on health, it is recommended to use abdominal breathing (or prenatal breathing) consisting in inhaling through the nose slowly, with your mouth closed, so that your lungs completely fill with fresh air, letting air reach down and expand your abdomen, allowing for even more air to go in. Once the air is inhaled, the breath is held in for one to two seconds (about the time for one to two heart beats) to let the blood charge itself with oxygen while passing through the lungs. Then, slowly exhale through the nose, while keeping your mouth closed.

Some will ask “Why should the mouth be kept closed even while we exhale?” The answer comes from Traditional Chinese Medicine, for which Tai Chi and Qigong are parts of. When we close the mouth, the tip of the tongue, by a natural reflex, automatically positions itself up on the pallet of the mouth, right behind the front teeth. That position of the tongue allows for saliva to be created and accumulated in the mouth. That saliva must be swallowed into the stomach in order for it to accomplish its main purpose, to help with the digestive process. Saliva is an essential element of the digestive system. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, saliva is part of the internal alchemy by which the foods we eat, the air we breathe and the life energy, the “Qi”, are transformed into the different elements needed to be healthy. Of course, the better the quality of the foods we eat and of the air we breathe is, the greater our vitality will be and the better our health will turn out to be.

Now, lets move on to the Qigong exercises.

1. The Posture of Infinity

According to ancient Chinese philosophy, the universe started from a vast void, the infinity. It is called “wuji” in Chinese. The main purpose of this stationary Qigong exercise is for posture awareness.



To start with, stand upright without tense. Your posture should be comfortable, with your feet about shoulder width apart. Starting from your head, straight, looking straight ahead, your chin slightly tucked in, your shoulders relaxed. There should be a small space in between your arm pits. If your arms are too tight, your shoulders will be tight and not relaxed. Relax your hips, relax your legs. The knees should be slightly bent, just enough so that you are comfortable. While bending at the knees, it is important to focus on bending down your hip joint and your knee joint so that your body still remains upright. It might seem obvious. Quite often you don't know if you are being straight. It is good to check yourself in a mirror just to make sure you are upright.

Concentrate on your posture, on being upright. Imagine that you are stretching yourself. Visualize your head stretching gently up and your legs stretching gently down as though you are gently stretching yourself so you are really upright but not tense.

Proceed with several slow and deep breathings as described in the section “Qigong and Breathing” on the previous page. You should do at least 5 of those breathings before moving on to the next exercise.

2. The Posture of Tai Chi

Back to the ancient Chinese philosophy, from the vast void, the infinity, the universe then developed into a state of Tai Chi, the “Supreme Ultimate”. It is like an immense ball comprising of two opposite and complementary halves, the yin and the yang. The main purpose of this stationary exercise is for dan tian awareness. The dan tian is the area approximately three finger breadths below your belly button. It is the center of Qi, the life energy.



From the first posture, when you are ready, and when your mind is clear and focused, bring your hands up slowly while breathing in. Then, breathing out, bring both of your hands to be in front of your chest, both of your hands are separated by about the width of your head. Fingers pointing up. There is a space between your hands and your chest. Imagine that there's an energy field between your hands and your chest. Your hands are slightly below your chin. At the same time that your hands are coming up to be in front of your chest, bend down slowly and exhale through your nose.

Don't bend too much, just bend a little bit, staying within your comfort zone. While bending at the knees, it is important to focus on bending down your hip joint and your knee joint so that your body still remains upright. The important thing for this posture is to be aware of your dan tian. Now what you need to do is just think about that area. If you feel something warm there, that's good, it's the feeling of life energy. If you don't feel anything it doesn't matter. Just be aware of your posture, think of your dan tian and as your Qigong progresses, you will gradually be more aware of your dan tian.

Proceed with several slow and deep breathings as described in the section “Qigong and Breathing” on the previous page. You should do at least 5 of those breathings before moving on to the next exercise. To finish off, stretch your hands and arms back to the front, without “locking” the elbows, and then bring your hands down and slowly, slowly stand up.

3. The Posture of Open and Close



This exercise with arm movements is the working of yin and yang. Closing is yin. Opening is yang. Its purpose is breathing awareness. Breathing is the center of all Qigong exercises. The ancient Chinese believe breath is life and life is energy. From the first posture, when you are ready, and when your mind is clear and focused, repeat the second posture, bring your hands up then bring your hands towards your chest, bend down slightly, and then open your hands to about shoulder width while breathing in. When opening your hands, do it so that both palms keep facing each other throughout the movement.

Then bring your hands back closer together, without touching, and breathe out. Between the palm of your hands, in the center of the palms, there are two acupuncture points. Imagine that there is a magnetic force between those two acupuncture points and as you breathe in, there is a gentle magnetic force preventing you from pulling your hands open, and as you breathe out that force goes against you, preventing you from pushing your hands back together.



Repeat this Open and Close exercise for several more breathings. You should do at least 5 of those breathings before moving on to the next exercise. To finish off, stretch your hands and arms back to the front, without “locking” the elbows, and then bring your hands down and slowly, slowly stand up.

4. The Posture of Expansion and Contraction



This exercise with arm movements allows for a large quantity of fresh air to enter the lungs. Its purpose is also for breathing awareness. From the first posture, the posture of Infinity, when you are ready and when your mind is clear and focused, breathe in while slowly bringing your arms up to shoulder level with your palms facing down and at shoulder width, making sure that the elbows are not “locked”. Your knees should be slightly bent, comfortable.

While relaxing the shoulder muscles and exhaling, turn your hands so that your palms are facing you, fingers pointing to each others with the middle fingers almost touching. The posture of your arms and hands is

maintained so that they make out a large circle.

The expansion movement as well as the inhaling happen while the arms are opening to the sides, as wide as possible, while maintaining a certain roundness of the arms (the shoulders, arms and hands make out a large semicircle). Try not to go too far to the sides.

The contraction movement as well as the exhaling happen while the arms and hands slowly come back to the starting position, with your arms and hands held so that they make out a large circle, with your fingers facing each others and almost touching.

When doing this posture of expansion and contraction, imagine that there is a magnetic force preventing you from opening your arms to the sides, and as you breathe out that force goes against you preventing you from bringing your hands back to the front. Alternatively, you can imagine that the air surrounding you is dense, and that you have to push against this dense air in order to open and close your arms.

Repeat this expansion and contraction exercise for several more breathings. You should do at least 5 of those breathings before moving on to the next exercise. To finish off, stretch your hands and arms back to the front, without “locking” the elbows, and then bring your hands down and slowly, slowly stand up.

5. The Posture of Up and Down



This exercise with arm movements is the working of Qi. Its purpose is posture, breathing, Qi and dan tian awareness.

From the first posture, the posture of Infinity, when you are ready and when your mind is clear and focused, breathe in while slowly bringing your arms up to shoulder level with your palms facing down and at shoulder width, making sure that the elbows are not “locked”. Your knees should be slightly bent, comfortable.

Then, while slowly exhaling, slowly bring your arms back down, your hand bending at the wrist so that your hands end up with the palms facing down, as if pushing on a flat surface with the fingers pointing straight ahead. Also, if you can, bend the knees a little bit more when going down, staying within your comfort zone. Next, bring your arms back up to shoulder level while inhaling slowly and deeply, with your palms facing down and at shoulder width, making sure that the elbows do not “lock”. If you did bend your knees a little more when bringing your arms and hands down, slowly get back up a little but stop before your knees “lock”.

When you breathe out, visualize your Qi moving down to the dan tian. When you breathe in, visualize your Qi moving up to the middle of your chest. It does not matter if you don't understand what Qi is, simply think about the dan tian area as you breathe in and out. As your Qigong improves, you will be able to understand and feel the Qi. While the sensation of Qi is different to different people, for most it feels like a warm and slightly heavy sensation.

Repeat this up and down exercise for several more breathings. You should do at least 5 of those breathings before moving on to the next exercise. To finish off, stretch your hands and arms back to the front, without "locking" the elbows, and then bring your hands down and slowly, slowly stand up.

What else is there about Qigong?

Once you have become proficient with the above Qigong exercises and if you would like to expand your knowledge and practice of Qigong, here are a few suggestions as "next steps":

Standing Qigong

- "*Qigong for Health, The 5 Element Qigong*", by Dr. Paul Lam

Standing and sitting Qigong

- "*Eight Simple Qigong Exercises for Health, The Eight Pieces of Brocade*", by Dr. Yang Jwing-Ming

QiShen Institute offers several Tai Chi and Qigong classes:

**The 24 Forms (known as the "Simplified" or "Beijing" Form)
Traditional Yang Style 103 Empty Hand Form
Sun Style 41 Forms – Tai Chi for Arthritis
Tai Chi for Strength and Balance
Traditional Sun Style 97 Forms
5 Elements Qigong**



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