



Qi Gong and Traditional Chinese Medicine

Preventative medicine has formed the basis of Traditional Chinese Medicine for thousands of years. Along with acupuncture, herbs, massage and nutrition, Qi Gong plays an important role in maintaining health and preventing disease. It is a unique combination of gentle exercise, stretching, meditation and mind-body awareness. It has been practiced for over 2500 years, and today hundreds of different forms and variations exist. Many of these forms are easy to learn and with regular practice can provide a lifetime of benefits.

Qi Gongs can be grouped into three main types, each with different aims; health Qi Gongs, martial arts Qi Gongs and religious Qi Gongs.

What is Qi?

The goal of Qi Gong is to generate and circulate Qi (sometimes referred to as Chi or Ki), harmonizing mind and body. Qi is a very broad concept without a single equivalent word in English. Sometimes translated as "breath," "energy," or even "influence," Qi is a reflection of the strength and health of both mind and body. Practicing Qi Gong is a way to train one's mind to control the Qi that flows in the body.

Qi Gong for Health

According to Traditional Chinese Medicine, health is defined as a harmonious balance between mind, body and our surrounding environments. Health Qi Gongs incorporate movement, meditation, deep breathing and visualizations to circulate Qi and restore or maintain balance. They can be used to maintain health and prevent illness or they can be used therapeutically to address specific conditions.

Most forms are a series of slow and gentle movements performed in a particular sequence. At first glance they look very similar to Taijiquan (Tai Chi Chuan). A central difference is that Taiji is a martial art and all Taiji movements are derived from martial art applications. In contrast, Qi Gong includes a greater variety of movements and is designed to integrate mind and body.

Another branch of health Qi Gong is referred to as "external Qi Gong." In this practice, practitioners use their Qi to treat others. This is a more esoteric practice that draws greater scepticism, but is nonetheless, a traditional part Qi Gong practice. Generally speaking, external Qi Gong is used as a temporary intervention for people unable to practice internal forms by themselves.

② **Ancient Traditions, Modern Research**

There are a growing number of studies looking at the health benefits of Qi Gong practice. A 20 year controlled study of 204 patients with high blood pressure found that regular Qi Gong practice cut stroke mortality in half.¹ Another study involved 50 postmenopausal women with osteoporosis. This study found that twice daily Qi Gong practice resulted in an increase of bone mineral density for the treatment group compared to no significant change in bone density for the control group who did not do any Qi Gong.² As well, there has been a large scale clinical study that followed 1361 people suffering from various pain conditions. In this study, each person practiced 18 Postures Qi Gong regularly. After a period of 2-4 months, over 98% reported increased mobility and less pain.³

② **About 18 Postures Qi Gong**

18 Postures Qi Gong (Lian Gong Shi Ba Fa) is a modern Qi Gong, developed in a Shanghai hospital to maintain health and to aid people in recovery from illness. Based on research into many traditional forms, 18 Postures combines therapeutic exercises, meditation and self-massage techniques. It has been officially endorsed by the Chinese Ministry of Health and is practiced throughout China as well as Japan and other Asian countries. The form consists of three sets of 18 movements. These movements are easy to learn and provide benefits on many levels, from improving balance and maintaining flexibility to increasing mental focus and mind-body awareness.

-
1. Kuang, An Kun. Studying the mechanism of Qi Gong in hypertension. *JTCM*. 1992; (4):9.
 2. Qian Yue Sheng, et al. Effect of Qi Gong on osteoporosis in postmenopausal women. *Chi J Integr Med (Eng)*. 1997; 3(2):109.
 3. summarized in: Zhuang Yuan Ming, et al. *Lian Gong in 18 Sections*. Shanghai Scientific and Technical Publishers. Shanghai. 1992.

I am indebted to Dr. Kai Chen M.M., Ph.D. (Beijing) for summarizing the Chinese research used in this factsheet.

Disclaimer

This factsheet is not intended to treat, diagnose or prescribe. The information provided is not to be considered a substitute for consultation with a qualified health care practitioner.

© James Saper, 2005



James Saper R.TCM.P.

328 Woolwich Street
Guelph, ON N1H 3W5
(519) 341.9314
acupuncture@gto.net