

What is Tai chi Qigong?



Tai chi Qigong is an ancient Chinese health care system that integrates physical postures, breathing techniques and focused intention.

The word Qigong (Chi Kung) is made up of two Chinese words.

- Qi , pronounced chee, means the life force or vital-energy that flows through all things in the universe.
- Gong, pronounced gung, means accomplishment, or skill that is cultivated through steady practice.
- Together, Qigong (Chi Kung) means **cultivating energy**. It is a system practiced for health maintenance, healing and increasing vitality.

Qigong is made up of physical postures (moving or stationary), breathing techniques, and focused intentions. Some practices: increase the Qi, circulate it, store it, or use qi to cleanse and heal the body.

Tai Chi is the most well-known form of qigong but there are over 10,000 different forms of qigong.

Qigong is a highly effective health care practice for self healing. Many health care professionals recommend Qigong as an important form of alternative complementary medicine. Harvard Medical School, Mayo Clinic, National Council on Aging, and others are all recommending qigong.

Other more traditional exercises do not involve the meridian system used in acupuncture nor do they emphasize the importance of adding mind intent and breathing techniques to physical movements. When these dimensions are added, the benefits of exercise increase exponentially.

The gentle, rhythmic movements of Qigong:

- **reduce stress, build stamina, increase vitality, and enhance the immune system.**
- **improve cardiovascular, respiratory, circulation, lymph and digestive functions.**
- Western scientific research confirms that Qigong reduces hypertension and the incidence of falling in the aged population. Research for other medical conditions is ongoing.

Benefits of a consistent practice:

- regain a youthful vitality,
- maintain health even into old age,
- helps speed recovery from illness.
- reestablishes the body/mind/soul connection.

People do Qigong to maintain health, heal their bodies, calm their minds, and reconnect with their spirit.

When these three aspects of our being are integrated, it encourages a positive outlook on life and helps eliminate harmful attitudes and behaviors. **It also creates a balanced life style, which brings greater harmony, stability, and enjoyment**

Qigong's great appeal is that everyone can benefit, regardless of ability, age, belief system or life circumstances. (National Qigong Association www.nqa.org)

Relaxed and Alert.com

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What We Hope to Accomplish with Qigong

The practice of Qigong dates back at least two thousand years.

Many ancient cultures felt that a supernatural or physical "energy flow" regulated the functioning of their bodies and of the world around them. In China, manipulation of this qi flow to improve health became the medical disciplines of acupuncture, acupressure, and Qigong.

How Qigong works:

Eastern Perspective:

- the vital energy qi flows along energy channels that link the internal organs with the fingers or toes and more than 300 acupuncture points on the head, spine and other parts of the body. It's believed that illness results from an imbalance of qi--when more accumulates in one place than another.
- The meditation, visualization, breathing, and movement exercises of Qigong seek to restore balance, breaking down blockages in the flow of qi and reestablishing a healthy supply to diseased or distressed parts of the body.

Western Perspective

- The repetitive movements, deep paced breathing, and meditative focus of qigong stimulate the relaxation response in the body (parasympathetic nervous system). This counteracts the effects of chronic stress (sympathetic nervous system) and allows the body to come back in to balance so it can heal itself. Recent research on the relaxation response shows how it can reverse the effects of aging and chronic stress on the body. "The relaxation response alters the expression of genes involved with processes such as inflammation, programmed cell death and how the body handles free radicals - molecules produced by normal metabolism that, if not appropriately neutralized, can damage cells and tissues." Dr. Herbert Benson, Harvard Medical School.
- It also corrects the pH of the body to be less acidic. (acids can build up the body due to the American lifestyle of poor diet e.g. highly processed foods, and lack of exercise).

Physical Benefits of Qigong:

- lowers heart rate and blood pressure, dilates blood vessels, and increases circulation
- improves lung's ability to absorb oxygen & brings more oxygen to the body's cells & tissues
- decreases the pain response (benefits nerves) & improves immune system and lymph fluid flow
- removes "garbage" and toxin substances from cells so improves general health.
- improves mood (by impacting hypothalamus, pituitary & pineal glands, & fluid of brain)
- increases the amount of disease-fighting white blood cells in the blood
- helps digestion by increasing enzymes and other substances needed for digestion
- improves balance and increases bone & muscle strength (reducing falls in seniors & osteoporosis). Enhances fitness and promotes healthy relaxation.

A great deal of research is being done on qigong for treating a variety of medical conditions.

See www.QigongInstitute.org or NIH NCCAM website for information.

Many physicians, including Dr. Oz, say that they have treated patients whose health has improved after they've adopted Qigong.

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Inclusive Exercises for People with DD and CI Key Points

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Benefits: Wellness activities are an important aspect of day center programming. The health benefits of tai chi qigong are well documented including improving flexibility, strength, range of motion, and balance to prevent falls, and the relaxation response reduces inflammation and provides antioxidant benefits to improve health and impact most chronic disease. For people with developmental disabilities, the benefits can be even more profound including weight loss, balance/mobility, physical and mental tension release, stress reduction, self esteem, and offering them a simple coping strategy to deal with difficult situations in their life.

Room set up: Chairs in a circle (semi circle with TV if using video). Quiet space, undisturbed. Room with a door. Natural light, or soft light is idea. In nature. Use soft music to drown out background noise. Chanting or repetitive music is best – not too relaxing like lullaby, or too active.

- 1. Always stay in the comfort zone.** Never go to a point of pain.
 - a. No ouch! Contracts muscles we are trying to relax.
 - b. Go at 80% of movement. Range of Motion (ROM) will increase naturally as the body relaxes.

- 2. Something is better than nothing.**
 - a. Do what can. Adapt for the individual. Keep moving!

- 3. Three Intentful Corrections:**
 - a. Posture – sit up straight with feet on the floor, not slump.
 - i. Uses less energy to sit up straight. Bones stacked on top.
 - ii. Boost up in wheel chair.
 - iii. Prop with pillows as needed. Adjust as join the group. Readjust as needed.
 - b. Slow deep breathing (belly breathing)
 - c. Focus in present moment on movements.
 - i. More inner focus eventually – turn senses inward.

- 4. Encourage independence – be their dance partner!**
 - a. Mirror exercises in front of person vs stand in front of the group
 - b. Encourage activity. Build their capacity – self efficacy. Self confidence.
 - i. Recruit the more independent people as group leaders. “Metronome to keep the group going.” Recognize them. Offer them a Leadership role.
 - ii. Take turns having each person lead a movement. (in order in the series, or their favorite)
 - iii. Stand if possible with support for some exercises. (walker, staff person)
 - iv. Use it or Lose it. Point out how this helps with life e.g. put on coat easier.

5. Use of DVDs and supportive materials based on level of the group.

- a. Still need active staff participation. Working with individuals. Encouraging the group.
- b. Staff training to lead the movements
- c. More cognitive impairment/physical disability – lower staff to client ratio needed and more client engagement. (25 indep. Vs 8 direct assist)
- d. Mixed groups can be wonderful. Leadership opportunity for more independent clients. Builds self esteem and self confidence.

6. Working with people with special needs and frail seniors

- a. ENTRAINMENT – be a healthy model – relaxed, focused, deep breathing.
- b. Inviting ways to offer hands & engage participants
 - i. Think “Empower them”. Never grab their wrist as it disempowers them.
 - ii. Offer hands, palms up, invitation to participate. Ok to pass.
 - iii. Mirror at level appropriate for them and their ability/ disability
 - iv. Focus on what can each person do (deep breathing, repetitive movement even if just move hands up and down)

7. How to adapt the movements for those needing hand over hand assistance

- a. Mirroring – full vs what is appropriate for them. Break into parts as needed.
- b. Guiding with one finger vs Guiding with hands “Dance partner guiding direction.”
- c. ROM support for joints (not passive ROM). Less is more.
- d. Keep moving

8. Sharing at the beginning and end of session.

- a. To keep focused during the session.
 - i. What is new in life, talk about healthy lifestyle,
 - ii. During the session we don’t engage in chitchat – stay focused on what we are doing.
- b. Take breaks as needed. Increase endurance for movement and focusing over time.

9. Celebrating Successes

- a. Thank each person for participating and recognize one area of improvement or participation
- b. Recognize significant improvements over time. Celebrate with the group to reward that person and encourage others. E.g. ability to lift affected arm or foot. Number of repetitions. ROM.
- c. Celebrate group achievements – kept focus longer, increased endurance – go longer without stopping

10. Outcomes

- a. Keep antidotal notes. E.g. 1/4/2014 John was able to lift arm to shoulder, turn waist 10%. Walked without lifting feet (shuffle). 3/1/2014 lift arms above head, turn waist 20%.
- b. Document improvement over time. Keep in case file or just as celebration.
- c. Include in client goal setting e.g. goal to participate in class 20% of time.
- d. Build into other goals e.g. walking or mobility goals with PT

Tai Chi Movements Summary

Tai Chi Qigong: A series of 17 movements taken from Tai Chi (Taiji) martial arts.

1. **Tai chi start**
2. **Opening the chest (curtains)** - Strengthen heart & lungs and reduce depression
3. **Rainbow Dance** (waving ribbons)– strengthens stomach and lose weight, clears headaches. "C"
4. **Swimming: Rolling the arms** – improve shoulder and neck flexibility, and lose weight. Good for heart & lungs as hand passes by. Good for reducing stress and panic.
5. **Separating the clouds** – stimulates Chong & Ren channels on the center front of the body to open chest, strengthen lungs, and clear blockages from head. (*Bottom hand R women*)
6. **Rowing the boat**– good for backache, tiredness & kidney.
7. **Tossing (Lifting) the ball** - good for spirit, blood pressure and mind balance (*across body*)
8. **Hide & Seek: Turning the body to look at the moon** - strengthens kidney & stomach, improves circulation, and lose weight.
9. **Patty Cake: Turning the waist to pushing palm** - strengthens stomach & kidneys and opens dantien. (*cup hands push across body*)
10. **Ride Horse/ Punching** - strengthens internal power and legs (body feels light with strong legs).
11. **Flying Wild Goose** - strengthens legs and kidneys.
12. **Rotating the wheel in a circle** - strengthens and loosens back
13. **Pushing the wave** - good for lungs, stomach and knees *Bow Stance, push down & out.*
14. **Flying Pigeon** - good for lungs, shoulders and circulation *Bow Stance, breathe out as come in.*
15. **Touch the Sea, Look at the sky** - flexibility of back and good circulation (also prevents headaches by opening top of head) *Bow Stance*
16. **Marching while bouncing a ball** - good for brain & test coordination and balance
17. **Tai Chi Close**- ending move to bring Qi back to dantien (calm & relax)

Tai Chi Story

We wake up in the morning and get out of bed (*tai chi start*). We go to the window and “*open the curtains*” to look outside. It is a beautiful day, we get to go to the lake so we do a little “*rainbow dance*” to celebrate.

We get to the lake and want to go “*swimming*”. The rain clouds come so we “*separate the clouds*” to push them away. We get in our boat and “*row the boat*” across the lake to the beach on the other side.

At the beach we play three games – play with the beach ball (*lifting the ball*), hide and seek (*turn and look at the moon*), and “*patty cake*”. We watch the clouds float by in the sky (*cloud hands*).

We then go riding on a horse down the beach (*punching, ride a horse*). We see a flock of geese in the sky and fly with them (*flying wild goose*). Finally we take a cart back to the beach (*turn in a wheel*).

At the beach we sit and watch the “*waves roll in*”, the birds playing (*flying pigeon*), and we “*touch the sea and look at the sky*” and say what a magnificent day.

We then “*march*” home, and crawl back into bed after our long day at the beach (*tai chi close*).

Tai Chi Movements

Tai Chi Qigong: A series of 17 movements taken from Tai Chi (Taiji) martial arts.

1. Tai chi start:

Raise arms to shoulder length with arms out straight in front, palms down and breathe in. Slowly lower hand until they are level with your waist while bending your knees and breathing out. Then raise your arms again while straightening your legs and breathing in.

2. Opening the chest (curtains) - Strengthen heart & lungs and reduce depression

Raise arms to shoulder height with arms straight out in front, palms down, and breathe in. Keeping joints relaxed, turn hands so that your palms face your chest and then open your arms out to the side while breathing out. Bring your arms back together so that the hands are shoulder width apart with palms facing each other and breathe in. Then turn palms face down and slowly lower your hands until they are at the level of the waist while bending your knees and breathing out. Repeat from the beginning, by raising arms and straightening your legs while breathing in.

3. Rainbow Dance (waving ribbons)– strengthens stomach and lose weight, clears headaches. Stand with feet slightly wider than shoulders. Lean to the left and bend your right leg. Raise your left arm to shoulder level and look at your left hand while raising your right hand above your head so that the palm's Laogong point faces the top of your head (Baihui point). Then lean to the right and bend your left leg. Let your right hand swing down to shoulder height and look at it while bringing your left hand up above your head. Then alternate between left and right breathing in on one side and out on the other. Note: the leg that bears the weight is also the side with the arm above the head. The side with the arm out is the side you are bending over toward.)

4. Swimming: Rolling the arms – improve shoulder and neck flexibility, and lose weight. Good for heart & lungs as hand passes by. Good for reducing stress and panic.

Keep your feet still and raise your arms to shoulder height with right arm forwards and left arms pointing backward with both palms up. Look at your left hand behind you. Bring your left hand up towards you and turn your body to face the front. Bring both hands towards you so that the left hand with palm down passes just above your left ear and comes to center at the chest while your right hand drops slightly and comes to the center of your chest (The left hand passes over right hand just in front of your chest). Then turn to the right and push your left hand forward. Turn your right hand palm down and push your hand to the back. As your right arm begins to extend, turn both palms so that they face up. Repeat to the right side.

5. Separating the clouds – stimulates acupuncture channels on the center front of the body to open chest, strengthen lungs, and clear blockages from head.

Slightly bend knees and hold hands in front of dantien with one hand covering the other (bottom hand: left – men, right – women) and straight back. Raise hands in front of your body until your palms are above your head and begin to straighten legs and breathe in. While bending knees and breathing out, turn your palms away from you and circle straight arms down the sides and finish in the front where they started.

6. Rowing the boat in the middle of the lake – good for backache, tiredness & kidney.

Turn arms slightly back and up to open chest while breathing in. With arms out, bend forward from the waist (keeping back straight) and continue circling arms forward while breathing out. Continue with arm circle back as straighten up and breathe in. (e.g. forward arm circles with bending of waist on way down in front)

7. **Tossing the Ball: Lifting up the ball** - good for spirit, blood pressure and mind balance
Turn to left and shift weight onto the left leg (right heel lifts off the ground). Raise your right arm and lift palm up as if gently lifting a balloon. Look at the right hand and raise the right arm above the shoulder, while the left arm moves behind you and to the left with palm facing the buttocks. Then turn the right palm over and lower hand while shifting the weight to the other hand and lifting the left hand.
8. **Hide & Seek: Turning the body to look at the moon** - strengthens kidney & stomach, improves circulation, and lose weight. (note the body will turn 135 degrees). Breathe in on one side and out on the other.
Turn to the left and shift weight onto the left left (right heel lifts off the ground). Raise both arms to the left and side (look in that direction). Sweep both arms down in front of you while bending knees and shifting weight to the right leg. Continue swinging until you end in the same position on the right.
9. **Patty Cake: Turning the waist to pushing palm** - strengthens stomach & kidneys and opens dantien. Bring hands up so they cross in front of the dantien. Turn to the left and bring the left hand back to waist at belt level and push right hand out in front at chest level. Look at right hand. Bring hands back to starting position and repeat to the right.
10. **Ride Horse/Punching** - strengthens internal power and legs (body feels light with strong legs). Start at horse stance with fists at waist. Punch forward with wrist rotating, but stop before arm is fully extended. (back straight, shoulders relaxed). Withdraw fist and repeat with other hand.
11. **Flying Wild Goose** - strengthens legs and kidneys.
Look straight ahead and fly like a bird by raising arms, elbows, wrists, fingers to shoulder level while breathing in. Then lower arms while breathing out.
12. **Wheel of Fortune / Cart: Rotating the wheel in a circle** - strengthens and loosens back
Breathe in as circle up and out as circle down. Keep back straight. Bend over and begin circling from waist toward left. Make a full circle with firm foundation 3 times and then repeat to the right.
13. **Watch Waves Roll In / Pushing the wave** - good for lungs, stomach and knees
Stand in bow stance (back foot at 45 degrees, front foot straight) and lift both arms to shoulder height with weight on back leg. Bring hands into chest with palms facing down while breathing in. sink down and move weight forward with palms pushing forwards at same time -- shift weight to front leg and straighten it (back leg goes up on toes) and breath out. Then pulls arms in palms down while breathing in and shifting weight onto back leg and then sink down. Do 6 times and then switch legs & repeat.
14. **Flying Pigeon** - good for lungs, shoulders and circulation
Start in bow stance and open arms out to the sides with palms facing forward. Weight is on back leg and toes of front foot rise off ground (look forwards and breath in). Shift weight forward and close arms in front while shifting weight onto front leg and breathing out (bring palms together). Repeat 5 times and then change legs.
15. **Touch the sea , Look at the sky** - flexibility of back and good circulation (also prevents headaches by opening top of head)
From bow stance open arms out to the side with palms forward, transfer weight to back foot and breathe in. ten shift weight to front leg and lean forwards and down to have hands closed across from knees. Repeat 6 times and then change feet.
16. **Marching while bouncing a ball** - good for brain & test coordination and balance
Marching by lifting same hand and foot. (Thigh up to level and arm to shoulders.) Move smoothly and relaxed. Stay in the same spot. May change to alternate hand and foot, or two times on one side.
17. **Tai Chi close**
Same movement as tai chi start but with the intention to settle energy in navel center.