

Chinese Baoding Balls: A Complete Guide

Health & Your Life in The Soko - Your world as it should be

Who knew rotating balls in your palm could have such positive effects? Dave Gabriele explains.

Chinese tradition says rotating two or more small balls in the palm of your hand is beneficial to your health. Sounds strange, but it has been done for hundreds of years, so there might be something to it.

You've probably seen Baoding balls in gift shops and tourist-traps in china-towns the world over. Branch out and try this ancient practice. Pumping iron isn't the only way to get strong arms and shoulders!

Believed to have originated sometime in the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), Baoding balls are named after the town of Baoding, where it is said that they originated. Intricate acupuncture and alternative theories are involved in explaining why using Baoding balls can be beneficial. Here's a primer:

Different Medicinal Theories

The first Baoding balls were made of solid iron. Said to improve health, the balls were used for hundreds of years by all social classes of Chinese citizens, including emperors. It may be hard to believe that a couple of spheres rotating in your palm would do anything for your health, but the Chinese understand the body differently than westerners.

According to Dr. Chou of the Chi Kung Clinic of Canada, western medicine sees each organ and part of the body as separate and controllable entities, while Chinese medicine sees all bodily systems as interconnected. For example, if a person walked into a doctor's office complaining about a headache, the doctor might prescribe him painkillers to ease the pain. The problem is that the headache isn't the real issue, it is only the effect of a cause—it is a symptom.

Chinese medicine says treating symptoms is not the best way to cure an ailment; one should instead look for the root of the cause. A Chinese doctor might suggest to that same person that their Qi (internal energy) is stagnant. He might even prescribe the Baoding balls.

How They Work

Regular use of Baoding balls is believed to calm the mind and body and also prevent, alleviate and even cure some ailments. The mild effort required to use them can relax muscles and joints in the arm and shoulder and improve blood circulation. But the effect of Baoding balls goes a little deeper than that according to Chinese medicine.

Chinese medical theory maintains that there are specific paths that run throughout our bodies. These paths are known as meridians, and they are the

conduits of the energy that flows through each person. The meridians connect all the systems of the body, so a seemingly unrelated action could affect something else in the body. Acupuncture and reflexology both take meridians into consideration. Chinese medicine is mainly concerned with unblocking the meridians and keeping the flow of energy strong. If your flow is strong then you are healthy—blocked or stagnant meridians cause health problems.

Because certain meridians end on your palms and fingers, and because these meridians are connected to vital areas of the body, including the heart and lungs, stimulating your hands can revitalize or unblock specific meridians in the body, increasing your well-being.

How to Use Them

To begin, choose a pair of balls you can handle easily. Place them in your hand and use your palm and fingers to rotate the balls in the direction that seems most natural. You can also tilt your palm at different angles in order to let gravity help you along. Once you are comfortable with rotating in one direction, experiment with the opposite direction. Your goal should be to eventually be able to rotate the balls comfortably in either direction.

There are different ways to use Baoding balls. You can rotate them smoothly so they don't hit each other hard, or for challenge you can rotate them so they don't touch at all. Remember to keep switching your hands so you maintain a healthy balance. As your hands strengthen, you can increase the size of the balls. If you practice for 10-15 minutes, you will notice that your forearm, shoulder, and hands are receiving a substantial workout.

Tips

- From personal experience, the best time to practice is in a car or on public transit (as long as you're not driving!) or while watching TV.
- Dr. Yang of the YMAA association has personally advised me to never use metal balls because they drain your energy. Use balls that are coated with plastic or ceramic so the metal never touches your skin. According to Dr. Yang, the best balls are made of solid stone or wood.

The whole world in your hand

Other cultures and traditions can teach us valuable lessons and expand our horizons. Give Baoding balls a try and open yourself to a new way of thinking.