

# Chinese Health Balls

Charge your *qi* with chiming balls.

BY LINDA WEBER

### WHAT ARE THEY

Chinese health balls, also known as Chinese exercise balls, are metal or stone balls a little larger than golf balls that are rotated, usually in pairs, in the palm of the hand. The balls often contain chimes that make a musical sound when rotated.

### HOW THEY WORK

In Chinese medicine, illness is caused by a blockage of life energy, *qi*, which runs through pathways in the body. Along the pathways are sensitive acupuncture points that connect with specific organs of the body. The hand contains a high concentration of such points. When the balls rotate in your hand, they stimulate the points, activating the *qi* to flow through the body.

### HEALTH BENEFITS

Cheryl Sterling, a licensed acupuncturist in San Francisco, California, says that exercise with the balls will stimulate circulation of *qi* and blood. Sterling says that according to Chinese tradition when the *qi* and blood flow are improved through use of the balls, there may be at least several positive effects, including improvement in energy and memory, relief from fatigue and depression, and increase in longevity.

### EVIDENCE

No Western medical studies have been done on the health benefits of using Chinese health balls. In China, however, their use dates back 1,000 years. Chinese people today are often seen using them. Hans Höting wrote in *Chinese Health Balls* (Binkey Kok Publications, Diever, Holland; U.S. distribution by Samuel Weiser, Inc.) that the balls have long been used in Chinese hospitals

to speed patients' recovery and that in China, "extensive written documentation" supports their health benefits.

### WHERE TO GET THEM

The balls are easy to find in shops that feature goods imported from China. Some New Age bookstores or health food stores may also stock them.

### WHICH ONES TO CHOOSE

Exercise balls come in two varieties. Hollow stainless steel balls, etched with designs or coated with multicolored cloisonné, have chimes inside. Solid balls are usually carved from marble or jade and make no musical sound. Which you choose is a matter of taste. But since jade and marble balls easily break when dropped, it's a good idea for beginners to start with steel balls. The spheres come in three sizes, from 4.5 cm. to 5.5 cm. in diameter. Start with the size that is most comfortable to use, and later graduate to a larger or smaller size.

### HOW TO USE THEM

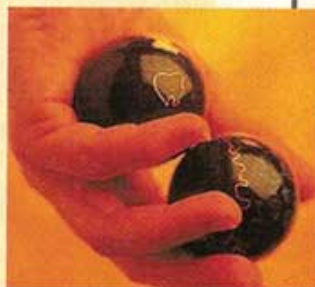
Sterling recommends practicing with the balls several times a day, three minutes with each hand. The basic exercise consists of rotating two balls in one hand in a flowing movement, first clockwise, then counterclockwise, before switching to the opposite hand. As you rotate the balls, relax and breathe evenly and deeply. Says Sterling: "Practicing with the balls can be a form of meditation, if you concentrate on the breathing and empty your mind of all thoughts." □

Linda Weber writes frequently for *Intuition and Parenting* magazines.

## Chinese Balls for the Advanced

Once you have mastered the basic exercise, (see *How to Use Them* at left) try variations: Do a different exercise in each hand; do exercises behind your back; or invent your own.

Chinese Health Balls author Han Höting suggests dozens of variations, including these:



**No Balls Touching:** Roll the balls away from the palm toward the outside of the hands so that they aren't touching each other as they rotate.

**Sweet Music:** These balls produce a harmonious sound while being rotated.

**Three-Ball Rotation:** Using the smallest-sized balls, rotate three of them in the same way that you would two balls.

**Catch the Ball!** With one ball placed in your more dexterous hand, hold the ball with your palm facing down. In this position, if you open your hand the ball will drop. Do exactly that. Then *immediately* reach down to catch the ball and clench it. To be safe (and avoid annoying anyone living beneath you), do this exercise over a soft surface (such as a thick carpet or foam cushion). Later switch hands.