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**OUT & ABOUT**

# A HANDY WORKOUT

Not just a gift shop novelty, Chinese health balls are an ancient remedy said to have mental and physical benefits

**DO IT**

Chinese health balls are often beautifully decorated, eye-catching pieces. But they're not meant to serve as home decor, especially with its valuable health benefits.

Twirl a pair of Chinese health balls in your hand and give your hands, fingers, wrists and mind a much-needed workout.

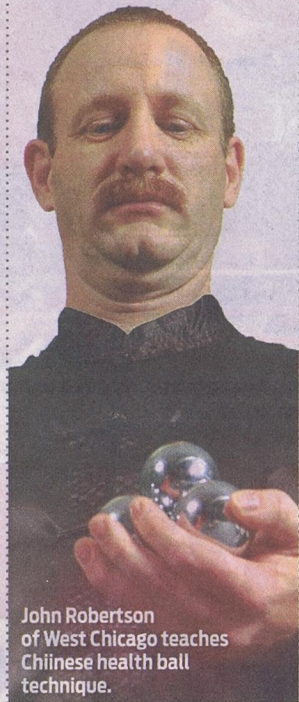
John Robertson of West Chicago teaches on the history and technique of Chinese health balls, also called Baoding Balls, among other names, through park districts around the suburbs.

"I found that a lot of people have Chinese health balls but don't know the benefits of them or even how to use them," says Robertson, who is a six-year Tai Chi instructor. "So I developed this class four years ago to teach those who'd like to learn."

The 2,000-year-old method can improve strength, flexibility, dexterity and circulation in the fingers, hands and wrists and can reduce the risk of carpal tunnel syndrome and arthritis when used properly. And there's a relaxing component too.

**WHAT  
YOU NEED**

Chinese health balls have come a long way from the use of walnuts, Robertson says. Today, they are sold in a variety of materials, such as steel, marble and jade for \$10 to \$60. Robertson suggests checking out Chinatown in Chicago for health balls, plus he sells them on his company's Web site at 7starsma.com. Those taking a class will receive a free set of health balls to teach them the most effective techniques.



**John Robertson**  
of West Chicago teaches  
Chinese health ball  
technique.

**WHERE TO GO**

The benefits don't stop at the hands. Chinese health balls can also be used to massage your feet, and it helps with stimulating the mind by reducing the risk of dementia and Alzheimer's disease, Robertson says.

Robertson will conduct introduction classes to Chinese health balls this fall offered through the Elmhurst, Roselle, Warrenville, Wood Dale and Lombard park districts. Check each park district for their start date and cost information.

Robertson's methods will also be featured at a class at The Lighthouse Center in Winfield. The class is from 1 to 4 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 26 and includes advanced techniques and qigong applications. Register before Sept. 19 and the cost is \$50; the fee is \$60 thereafter. Call (630) 229-4434 to register.

— Alicia Spates