



The Practice of Qigong

By Jackie Christensen, BS, HHP, NC, MH
Faculty Member of GCNM

Qigong is an ancient Chinese system of exercise that incorporates breathwork and meditation techniques. It has been used to improve health, preventing illness, and strengthening the mind, body and spirit. The term "Qi" was coined by the Chinese to refer to the vital force behind all things in the universe. The term "gong" refers to the power to accomplish something through a steady and sustained practice. Qigong can be loosely translated as the "attainment of qi."

Qi gong has been an important part of Eastern history and culture and can be traced back to the dance of Yinkong, an early documented dance for arthritis prevention and healing. About 7,000 years ago those who practiced Yinkong intuitively knew that feeling bad was associated with a lack of movement. Through the dance of Yinkong people developed an understanding that feeling good and well being was connected to certain motions and those motions could be used to create energy or qi. The motions also helped to release blocked energies and emotional feelings in their bodies. Over time a deeper understanding developed regarding the actual flow of energy through the body and the Chinese mapped the channels through which energy flowed and discovered the laws and principles of how qi was moved.

With more than 10,000 styles of qigong and 200 million people practicing there are a variety of methods and reasons for practice. For health maintenance, the qigong practitioner does not have to be an expert. Almost anyone can learn to practice qigong to maintain and improve his or her own health. The objective of the exercises is to strengthen the qi in the body and remove obstructions that may have developed due to injury, emotional states, diet, disease or other factors which can lead to an imbalance. Medical qigong is now practiced in clinics and some hospitals that integrate traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and conventional Western medicine.

Qigong's gentle, rhythmic exercises mirror the movements of nature, especially the fluidity of water. Qigong routines can be simple or complex, short or long, and can be done at standing, walking, sitting and lying down. While some are quite vigorous and demanding, others can be practiced by people who are weak in order to regain strength and health. When setting up a regular qi gong practice choose the same time and the same location every day. The space should be open, preferably with fresh air, but no strong winds and relatively quiet so that you will not be easily disturbed or distracted. Make sure that when practicing qi gong you are well rested and your mind is free from needless distractions. Do not eat a heavy meal before practice; it will inhibit the vital chi energy from flowing. If you are hungry, eat a light meal or snack a half hour before practice, but if possible, abstain from eating. Wear loose comfortable clothing. Tight clothing restricts movement, blood circulation and the flow of vital chi energy. While practicing it is also important to calm the mind, relax the body, and visualize the tension easing out of your muscles.

Qi masters and consultants have been hired by companies like Sony, Sega, Honda and NEC to help their employees relax, focus, relieve stress, remain calm, concentrate better, and think positively. As qi gong gains popularity in the US more and more classes have become available. However, if qi gong has not yet made it to your area there are also many instructional books, videos, and websites available. Qi-gong practice usually changes the depth, frequency and rhythm of respiration in a conscious state. Breathing is a critical component in making the exercise effective and combining breathing with meditation helps reduce stress. The deepening of respiration expands lung capacity, promotes circulation of oxygen in the blood, massages the internal abdominal organs and helps the digestion and assimilation of food.