

# ENHANCE YOUR LIFE WITH QIGONG

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What can we do to avoid sickness, debility, and senility in our lives? What can we do to help ourselves heal from diseases or afflictions already a part of our lives? What can we do to create a longer, healthier, enjoyable, and more productive life? I suggest we look toward the ancient wisdom of the Chinese people who have studied the phenomenon of health and longevity for over 5,000 years to find these answers.

A vast body of Chinese medical knowledge has accrued from these efforts, providing a viable alternative to unhealthy, destructive life habits. The ancient Chinese medical texts are filled with information about how to prevent disease and degeneration combined with numerous guiding principles for how to create a healthful and long life.

This Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) view of health emphasizes the influence of emotions, nature, electromagnetic forces, and energy on the human body and spirit. It also emphasizes the importance of prevention as a necessary first step toward the creation and maintenance of good health. The first classic of Chinese medicine, the *Nei Jing*, states “treating disease after it arises is like beginning to dig a well after one has become thirsty or like forging spears after war has already broken out.”

The Chinese system of healing is built on the belief that vital energy (*Qi*) flows throughout every living thing and health depends on how and where this energy is flowing. *Qi* motivates all vital functions and transformations and thus sustains life. After birth, *Qi* comes from the digestion and transformation of the food, water and herbs we ingest and the air we breathe. This means, it is not only important to eat right to have strong *Qi*, but to live in a well-ventilated environment and to get plenty of fresh air. Ultimately, everything in Chinese medicine is based on the concept of *Qi*.

In ancient China prior to 500 B.C. and the dynasties led by kings, it is believed that it was the mature women shamans who created the art of *Qi* cultivation through their magical powers. The ideogram for women, “*wu*”, is even thought to originally mean “to heal.” This art of cultivation, known today as *Qigong* (*pronounced chee-GUNG*), is literally translated as “*Qi* cultivation.” Often referred to as “*Chinese Yoga*” or “*Feng Shui for the body*,” *Qigong* is an ancient healing tool used to create medicine

naturally, support the welfare of the physical body, and retard the aging process.

Twenty minutes of Qigong practice on a regular basis creates profound health benefits. Its slow, gentle, rhythmical, meditative movements prod the entire body to relax as it opens, strengthens and restores the proper flow of Qi. Qigong is suitable for all ages and abilities and can be performed standing, sitting or lying down. A typical Qigong workout includes stretching and strengthening exercises, breathwork, creative visualization, self-massage, vocalization of sounds and meditation through movement and stillness.

The free flow of Qi created through these movements removes Qi blockages within the energetic pathways (*meridians*) of the body and promotes blood flow that transports nourishment to vital organs, glands, and tissue. When Qi and blood is flowing freely as a result of this ancient art of self-healing and fitness youthful skin, eyes, and hair are maintained, sexual vitality is enhanced, bones are fortified, muscles and tendons are flexible, hormones are balanced, organ function is strengthened, and energy is plentiful.

The detoxification, Qi cultivation, storage and refinement that result from Qigong practice helps people take charge of their healing process and increases the effectiveness of other healing techniques. Qigong also tones the mind and spirit as it promotes mental clarity and a peaceful, nourished spirit (*Shen*). It is a powerful self-healing tool that has been likened to “*giving oneself acupuncture*” for all of the reasons already, in addition to its ability to balance the Yin and Yang energies of the body.

According to Oriental Medicine, health can be assessed according to the predominance of either too much, or too little, Yin or Yang in the body. This is based on the Yin Yang Theory which teaches that good health occurs when balance is maintained between these two opposing, yet intimately related and attracting, energies.

Each person is made up of a predominance of either Yin or Yang energy. Women tend to be more Yin whereas men tend to be more Yang. This is because women tend to be more cold, soft, deep, wet, internal and contracting which are Yin qualities, whereas men tend to be more hot, hard, superficial, dry, external and expanding which are Yang qualities. During a healing process, the goal is to move more toward the center of the Yin Yang continuum, so that a preponderance of Yin or Yang is no longer creating imbalance within the system.

YANG RELATES TO:	YIN RELATES TO:
SKY	EARTH
MAN	WOMAN
QI	BLOOD
HOT	COLD
EXTERNAL	INTERNAL
DAY	NIGHT
WHITE	BLACK
SUN	MOON
FULL	EMPTY
FIRE	WATER
OUTSIDE	INSIDE
BACK	FRONT
ACTIVE	PASSIVE
LEFT	RIGHT

The relative balance between these energies “*waxes and wanes*” depending on various factors such as the energetic of foods eaten, environmental conditions, emotional state, hereditary factors, and exercise habits. For example, ingesting cold, wet food or living in a cold, damp environment creates a predominance of Yin, whereas hot, dry foods or living in a hot climate creates more Yang. A practical application of this information leads one to lifestyle choices that tend to bring a person more to the center of the Yin and Yang continuum. Qigong, as a form of exercise, naturally promotes balance between the Yin and Yang energies of the body thereby improving overall health.

The following Qigong exercise “*Fluffing White Clouds*” synchronizes movements with a slow, rhythmic, and deep breathing technique. This is done to increase lung capacity, cultivate and balance Qi, calm the emotions and spirit (*Shen*), nourish vital essence (*Jing*), and balance the energies of Yin and Yang.

*Stand with your feet parallel, shoulder-width apart with your knees slightly bent. Your hands are resting open at your sides with your pinky fingers next to your thighs and fingertips facing the earth.*

*As you inhale, straighten your knees and lift your hands to shoulder height in front of you with palms facing upward and elbows slightly bent.*

*As you exhale, turn your palms downward and bring your arms down, drawing your wrists back in toward your body and bending your knees again. The heel of your hand leads and fingertips follow.*

*End with elbows slightly bent, palms face downward, your hands by your sides stretched out flat as if gently patting white clouds.*

*Turn your palms upward and continue from the beginning. Coordinate the movement of your hands with the bending and straightening of your legs.*

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The experience and sensation of Qi flow during this exercise may seem extraordinary, because it is. As your hands move upward, it may feel as if there is a heavy weight in your palms. By contrast, when your palms turn downward and float back to your sides, it may feel as if there is a light, fluffy pillow beneath them. These sensations may increase with each repetition. Please don't be concerned if you're not feeling anything, it is still working!

I encourage you to practice this and other Qi enhancing exercises to improve your well-being. The more you practice, the more your life experience flows. You become infused with peace, self-knowledge, intuition, balance, vibrancy and focus - all great things to counteract the daily stress and pressures in modern life. Best of all — Qigong provides a new zest for life and a time-proven way to experience a healthful, long life.

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*Shoshanna Katzman is author of *Qigong for Staying Young: A Simple 20 Minute Workout to Cultivate Your Vital Energy*, Avery/Penguin Group USA, October, 2003 along with a companion DVD and video produced by Swing Pictures, LLC. She has been a Tai Chi and Qigong practitioner since 1974 and Director of the Red Bank Acupuncture and Wellness Center ([healing4u.com](http://healing4u.com)) since 1988. Shoshanna was the first woman President of the National Qigong Association ([nqa.org](http://nqa.org)) and currently serves as an Editorial Adviser for Body & Soul Magazine. She is President of the New Jersey Acupuncture Examining Board, producer of annual women wellness conferences ([caringwomen.com](http://caringwomen.com)) and co-author of *Feeling Light: The Holistic Solution to Permanent Weight Loss and Wellness* Avon Books, 1997.*

