

Excerpt from Integrative Healing

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INTEGRATIVE HEALING

Developing
Wellness in the
Mind and Body

Z ALTUG PT, DPT, MS, CSCS



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CHAPTER 8

QI GONG FOR HEALTH

This chapter was completed with the assistance of Derek Plonka, DPT, MTOM, L.Ac, CSCS. Dr. Plonka is a physical therapist and acupuncturist with over 20 years of experience in treating musculoskeletal conditions and movement disorders. As a physical therapist, he has been practicing privately in Santa Monica, California since 2004 at the Insight Wellness Clinic (www.InsightWellnessClinic.com) and in 2015 he completed his Masters in Traditional Oriental Medicine at Emperor's College of Traditional Oriental Medicine (ECTOM). He remains involved with ECTOM, for which he serves as the Doctoral Program Faculty and CAPSTONE Advisor, helping students mesh together an understanding of Eastern and Western Medicine. It is his multifaceted approach to patient care which lends a unique perspective to his contributions in this book.

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“Qi gong therapy, as well as other branches of Chinese medicine, can be reduced to two simple principles: the cleansing of meridians to achieve harmonious energy flow, and the restoration of yin-yang balance.”

—The Art of Chi Kung by Wong Kiew Kit

Qi Gong (pronounced as “chee-goong”) is a traditional Chinese movement therapy (Kerr 2002) and ancient martial art approach to healing that harnesses internal energy through movement (postures involving strength, flexibility, and balance), breathing exercises, relaxation, and meditation. *Qi* (breath, air, spirit) in Chinese stands for “energy of life” and *gong* means “work” or “practice.” Thus, *Qi Gong* (also known as qigong) means “working with the energy of life” (Johnson 2000; Venes 2017).

The word “Qi Gong” dates back to two published works, in 1915 and 1929, and the therapeutic use of the term dates to 1936. Common use of the term is relatively recent as the practice has been known by many names throughout Chinese history, such as chi kung. There are many forms of Qi Gong, such as

Medical Qi Gong, Fragrant Qi Gong, Guo Lin Qi Gong (walking Qi Gong), Five Animals Play Qi Gong, Eight Strands of Brocade Qi Gong (or Eight-Section Brocade), Tai Chi Qi Gong, and Six Healing Sounds. The term brocade used in this context is to liken Qi Gong movements to a silken and smooth quality.

Also, Qi Gong has several schools with their unique theories, such as Chinese Medical Qi Gong, Daoist Qi Gong, Buddhist Qi Gong, Confucian Qi Gong, and Martial Arts Qi Gong. The earliest Qi Gong-like exercises in China are ritual animal dances and movements. Many Qi Gong postures have names such as Bathing Duck, Leaping Monkey, Turning Tiger, Coiling Snake, Old Bear in the Woods, and Flying Crane (Cohen 1997).

Z ALTUG'S PERSPECTIVE FOR DOING QI GONG

In my clinical practice as a physical therapist, I typically recommend Qi Gong to patients and clients who need to improve posture and balance, manage stress, and work on mobility. In my opinion, individual and small groups of Qi Gong poses tend to be easier to learn than the longer sequences in Tai Chi. Qi Gong is a great introduction to some gentle movements used in martial arts. Other general reasons to try Qi Gong include:

- Relieve stress and tension
- Improve overall health
- Improve flexibility
- Improve breathing
- Improve strength
- Improve balance
- Improve posture
- Improve circulation
- Help manage pain
- Help manage weight
- Help find inner peace

DR. DEREK PLONKA'S PERSPECTIVE FOR DOING QI GONG

“The door hinge in an inhabited house will never be insect riddled. Rhythmic movement aids digestion and blood circulation, promoting health.”—Dr. Hua Tou. “Flowing water never freezes and the hinge of a moving door never rusts”—Unknown. Although the words may differ, the idea is universally understood. The same can be said for Qi Gong (Dao Yin), as there are many different lineages of practice and methods to implement it. What we see is that the door's hinges

stay in good working order, but do not always see the door swing and we do not see the inner workings of the hinge. A person may perform the daily movements with their body, but will not see the internal mechanisms that influence how they perform their daily routine. The body may move, but in Qi Gong, the most important movement is the connection inside with the outside. It is your inner mechanism which connects the breath, the mind, and the spirit. Without the connection, a person becomes disjointed and diseases will begin to manifest in the body, the spirit, or the mind.

In my (Derek Plonka) practice, Qi Gong may be used to influence the acupuncture or pressure points of a patient, or I may prescribe a patient the movements (in connection with the breath) to promote Qi (energy) to flow through the channel(s) associated with the organ system(s), which are presenting a disharmony. Deficient conditions would benefit from color visualizations, where an excess condition would benefit from sound resonance. Qi Gong prescription could be performed while lying on the back, sitting, standing in traditional postures, or walking. The appropriateness of these aspects of Qi Gong needs to be assessed and implemented by an experienced practitioner of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). But for an individual beginning the practice of Qi Gong, the importance is placed on quieting the mind and synchronizing the breath to the body's movements. Staying with a simple and balanced routine, practitioners can promote their own health by performing the Eight-Section Brocade Standing Exercises (also known as **Eight Strands of Brocade Qi Gong**) presented in this chapter.

LET'S SEE WHAT RESEARCH SAYS . . .

- Guolin-Qi Gong (or walking Qi Gong) improves quality of life and immunological function during recovery after breast cancer (Liu et al. 2017).
- Qi Gong exercise involving six healing sounds reduces pro-inflammatory cytokines in people with Parkinson's disease and helps improve sleep quality (Moon et al. 2017).
- Tai Chi Qi Gong is useful for improving the quality of sleep in older adults with cognitive impairment (Chan et al. 2016).
- Qi Gong could be a helpful non-medical method for lessening pain in the chewing muscles, for increasing shoulder mobility, and for lessening sleep problems in survivors of inner nose cancers (Fong et al. 2015).
- There is potential for 'Six Healing Sounds' Qi Gong exercise to improve sleep and other symptoms in breast cancer survivors (Liu et al. 2015).
- Qi Gong may be effective for reducing fatigue and distress in prostate cancer survivors (Campo et al. 2014).
- Qi Gong has been shown to be influential to postural stability and to reducing Parkinson's disease-related falls (Loftus 2014).