

Daily Qigong for Health

*Qigong exercises for beginners
with instructions and commentary on
Traditional Chinese Medicine*

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with J. Hoyt

Preface

These exercises originate with Professor Dominick Ho Ji-Kwan, a prominent Confucian scholar, calligraphy master and martial arts instructor. He referred to the set as "Chinese health methods." These health methods were passed to me by his disciple and lineage holder, Allan Olthoff, DO. Over the years, I have made modifications and inserted appropriate additions based on experience and my knowledge of Chinese Medicine. Dr. Olthoff tells the story of his training partner who was only interested in martial prowess and did not take time to learn these qigong exercises. When the two sparred, he noticed that Dr. Allan was becoming stronger and quicker and asked him why. Dr. Allan replied "Chinese health methods." His partner then went back to Professor Ho and ask to be taught the Chinese health methods.

These exercises, although seemingly simple, rejuvenate the entire body's energy system. Although Professor Ho stated that they are a whole system of body maintenance, I have had success selecting portions of the exercises for specific healing with patients.



Overview

Preface

Head Group

Hand Group

Leg Group

Stomach Group

Back/Front Group

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BEFORE BEGINNING

Stance

Find a comfortable chair to sit in. A wood chair with a non-slanting seat is best. Both feet should rest easily, completely flat, on the ground.

The head should be held with the crown of the head up, chin down, with eyes resting by looking straight ahead.

Breathe evenly throughout the exercises.

If pain is experienced, please stop.

If pain continues, please consult with your physician or licensed TCM practitioner.

A note on repetitions:

The Chinese way is to do everything many times.

The American way is to do everything once.

It is our goal to strive for a contented psychic (happy medium). Thirty-six repetitions for each exercise is what Professor Ho taught.

Nine times is good, too.



HEAD GROUP

1. Warm Hands

Although this maneuver belongs to the handset, is necessary to have the palms warm and filled with Qi before applying to the face.

Place palms together slanting upwards, with the long finger on one hand aligned with the center of the wrist crease (the carpal tunnel) of the other hand. With hands relaxed, firmly rub the palm together 36 times or until warm.



This exercise stimulates the pericardium meridian of hand jueyin. This meridian is associated with the fire element and bring warm and vigorous fire qi to the hands. The pericardium meridian is most important in treating carpal tunnel syndrome brought on by repetitive stress. This maneuver, along with the rest of the hand set, serves as both treatment and prevention of the disorder.

HEAD GROUP

2. Wash Face

Place “yuji” (thenar eminence, or, other words, the pad below the thumb) on Yintang point (the place between the eyebrows). Rub down beside the nose and up to the hairline 36 times.



This maneuver stimulates the taiyang and yangming meridians and serves to treat and prevent diseases caused by the external climate conditions (allergies, common cold, sinusitis). The face is exposed to the elements and suffers their effects. By stimulating regions on the front of the face, the abundant qi and blood in the yangming channels can support more defense qi as well as nourish the surrounding tissues, thereby maintaining a healthy, youthful appearance.

HEAD GROUP

3. Wash Forehead

Place yuji on Yintang point (between the eyebrows) and wipe outward to the center of the temple (Taiyang point). Release and repeat 36 times.



Invigorating the qi of the forehead by crossing the Urinary Bladder, Gall Bladder and San Jiao meridians, the hot raising qi is dispersed, preventing headaches. As the superficial tissues of the forehead are stimulated and stretched, the circulation of qi and blood is increased and the elasticity of the tissues enhanced, preventing and eliminating wrinkles.

I teach the face set as part of an acupuncture facial beauty enhancement package.

HEAD GROUP

4. Release Temples

- 1) Place yuji on temples (Taiyang point) and knead in a clockwise circular motion 36 times.
- 2) Place thumbs on Taiyang point, pressing firmly run back above ears and behind mastoid process (bone behind the ear). Using the remaining fingers, press on muscles and base of skull (sternocleidomastoid and trapezius muscles) at GB20 point 36 times.



- 1) *Massaging Taiyang point releases heat and moves stagnant qi in the gallbladder meridian of foot shaoyang.*
- 2) *The shaoyang meridians rule the lateral aspect of the body. By running the thumbs along the gallbladder meridian, the sides of the body are opened thus balancing the upward and downward flow of qi. This helps to prevent headaches and benefits the eyes and ears.*

HEAD GROUP

5. Elevator Ears

Place the yuji behind the pinna (outer flap of the ear). Fold a loose fist around the front of the ear. Gently, pull up on ear, stretching it. Gently, pull down.

Repeat 36 times.



In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the structure of the ear is considered a micro-system. This is the concept that created reflexology. The ear reflects the organ systems and their functions of the body in microcosm. The use of reflexology gives easier access to healing options.

The external ear flaps being stimulated in this exercise reflect the outer physical body. The area behind the ear is called the hypertensive area. Massaging here can help reduce blood pressure.

HEAD GROUP

6. Rectify Canal

- 1) Place the long finger in the triangular fossa (the dish like depression at the top of the ear). Run the finger down to the intratragic notch (the loop at the bottom of the ear). Repeat 36 times.
- 2) Place the long finger at the opening of the external canal (the hole that goes into the inner ear). Run straight back to the back of the ear. Repeat 36 times.
- 3) Occlude (close off) the external canal with the long finger. Pull both fingers out at once, creating a popping sound. Perhaps repeat only nine times.



- 1))& 2) *The inner grooves of the ear (cavum concha and cymba concha) reflect the internal body. These exercises stimulate the Internal organs.*
- 2) 3) *Clearing the external canal opens the ear, benefits hearing (clearing buildup) and stimulates the cranial nerves and brain.*

HEAD GROUP

7. Bang the Drum

Place the hands on the back of the head at the base of the skull (external occipital protuberance and acupoint UB10). With the palms closing the ears, place the index finger over the long finger and flick the long finger against the head producing a drum-like sound. Drum 36 times.



This maneuver clears blockages at the back of the head and stimulates the brain. Acupoint UB10 is where the extraordinary vessels yin and yang qiao mai enter the brain and nourish the cranial nerves.

HEAD GROUP

8. Puff the Magic Dragon

- 1) With the tongue resting on the upper palate, open the mouth wide. Using the platysma muscles at the front of the neck, open the eyes wide.
- 2) With the tongue resting on the upper palate, close the mouth and puff out the cheeks.
- 3) Repeat at least nine times.



Although this exercise my look strange, it stimulates circulation to and from the head and face. In Chinese medicine, the neck is called the window to heaven, connecting the brain to the body and conducting nerve impulses to the internal organs.

Stimulation of this area benefits brain and body function.

HEAD GROUP

10. Eyes Turn Head

- 1) Keeping the head straight and relaxed, let your eyes look to the right and your neck follow. Repeat to the left for a total of 18 times.
- 2) Look upward and let your neck follow. Next look down and bend your neck downward. Repeat 36 times.



In Chinese medicine, the shaoyang meridians control turning movements. Turning the head may seem simple but many people manifest aging by stiffening of the spine. Starting from the top loosens the spine and keeps the body moving. Bending up and down regulates the ren and du vessels. Loosening the neck enhances communication between the cranial nerves and the rest of the body.

HAND GROUP

1. Floating Hands

Starting with the hands resting on the legs near the knees, slowly raise one hand with the arm just short of fully extended to eye level. Allow the hand to descend downward in relaxed palmer flexion. Then slowly lower the arm, allowing the hand to point upward in relaxed dorsal flexion. Keep your eyes on the hand and move slowly. Then repeat with other hand, 36 times for each hand.



This exercise performs a gentle range of motion of the wrist joint. This aids in maintaining flexibility, helps in preventing arthritis and guards against the formation of carpal tunnel syndrome by opening and closing the yin and yang channels of the hand repeatedly, increasing the flow of qi and blood to the hands. It is important for the eyes to follow the motion to help guide and reinforce the movement of the qi.

HAND GROUP

2. Shrugging Shoulders

With the hands resting on the legs, raise one shoulder to the ear. Next, roll the shoulder backward and down, making a circle while pulling the same side hand along the leg. Repeat on the opposite side for a total of 36 repetitions for each side.



This maneuver loosens the shoulders and benefits the neck and upper back by resolving the tension created by daily stress. However, in terms of Chinese medicine, it also aids digestion and builds energy. The motion of the hand being pulled up and down along the leg stimulates the stomach and spleen meridians, the main organs involved in turning food into qi.

HAND GROUP

3. Soothe Shoulders

Raise the right arm to shoulder height with the elbow bent at a 35 degree angle. With fingers relaxed and extended, place the left hand on top of the right hand across the fingers.

Rotate the waist to the right while rubbing the left hand gently along the right arm to the shoulder. Rotate the waist back to facing forward while rubbing the left hand back to the fingers. Repeat on the left, 36 times each side.



This exercise stimulates the yang meridians of the arm. The yang meridians control the major muscles of the arm and are where arthritis usually starts. Use of this technique helps stimulate the muscles and prevent arthritis. In addition, the rotation of the waist benefits the internal organs. According to Chinese theory because humans are the only “vertical” animal, they suffer from cramping of the organs due to the effects of gravity. Waist rotation relieves this stagnation and promotes circulation, thus nourishing internal organ health.

HAND GROUP

4. Rotate Wrists

Raise the arms to shoulder height with the elbows slightly bent. Bring the fingers of both hands together to loosely touch at their ends, with the finger tips pointing downward. The motion is like holding a calligraphy brush. Then rotate the wrists in opposite directions, one clockwise, the other counterclockwise. Repeat 36 times; then reverse direction and repeat 36 times.



This twisting motion of this maneuver benefits the wrists to help prevent carpal tunnel syndrome while maintaining strength and flexibility of the fingers. It also stimulates the flow of qi down to the ends of the fingertips, promoting blood circulation.

HAND GROUP

5. Stimulate Heart Qi

Place the hands roughly 18" apart with the fingers extended. Bring the hands together quickly, making a clapping sound while interlacing the fingers. Clasp the palms tightly and then release. Repeat 36 times.



This stimulates the yin surface of the hand (the palm) and particularly the fire points of the heart and pericardium meridians. Because of this, not only does this motion stimulate the hands, but it also strengthens the heart and promotes joy.

HAND GROUP

6. Awaken Fingers

Place the arms bent in front of you at heart level. Grasp the thumb of one hand in the opposite fist close to the metacarpal joint. and pull gently. Repeat and move onto each finger in sequence. If you hear a slight popping sound, this is normal sound but not a necessary sound. If you feel pain, stop immediately. If pain persists, see a doctor.

Repeat three times for each hand.



This maneuver stretches the fingers, prevents arthritis and benefits the tendons. When combined with the next maneuver, it stimulates the distal ends of the meridians. The distal ends of the meridians are home to the jing well points. Jing well points are used in Traditional Chinese Medicine to release heat and relieve inflammation, all worthwhile techniques in the treatment of arthritis.

HAND GROUP

7. Rectify Fingers

With the arms in the same position as the last exercise, place the thumb of the left hand between the index and middle fingers of the right hand. With the middle portions of the fingers clasping just behind the nail, squeeze the thumb and pull, creating a snapping sound as the thumb is released. Repeat motion on each finger three times for each hand.



Rectifying is a common maneuver in Tuina (Chinese massage). It opens the flow of qi in a meridian by stimulating the most distal point (jing-well). Besides bringing qi and blood to the hands, this exercise can relieve pain anywhere along the course of the meridian. This is a useful practice for warming cold or numb hands.

HAND GROUP

8. Play Qi Ball

Hold the arms roughly two feet apart in front of the abdomen. Face the palms together, extending your fingers as far as they comfortably can, while inhaling. Slowly bring the palms closer together without touching. Finally, relax the fingers as you exhale and bring them apart. Repeat 36 times

Repeat the exercise without stretching the fingers and with the palms relaxed and open.



This is a variation on a common qigong exercise for cultivating and controlling qi. In the first part, you are stretching the fingers and opening the point PC8 (LaoGong), the primary point for qigong practice. In the second part, you should relax and be aware of the sensations being felt in your hands. The PC8 points of both hands should be lined up and facing each other. You can locate this point by bending your middle finger to touch the palm. PC8 is located where the middle finger touches the hand.

LEG GROUP

1. Seated Walking

With your palms resting on your legs, knees bent at a 90 degree angle, extend one leg at a 30 degree angle and rest it on the heel for ten seconds. Return the leg to its former position. Repeat with the other leg, extending 36 times each side.



This simple maneuver is useful for those who have difficulty walking. Because this exercise does not involve “weight bearing” motions, performing this exercise preserves movement and prevents stiffness of the joints.

This exercise also stimulates the meridians of the legs and prepares the flow of qi for the next movement.

LEG GROUP

2. Unite Yin and Yang 1

Extend one leg at a 35 degree angle from the body resting on the heel (as in the last exercise). Form “void fists” with the hands. Void fists is a loose fist with the fingers not curled all the way under with some space inside and the thumb not folded under. Using the base of the palm and the upper segment of the fingers, gently pummel the lateral side and lateral top of the leg. As you do this, bend forward at the waist so as to move down toward the knee for 30 seconds. Repeat on the medial (inside) and medial top of the leg.



This simple exercise is helpful in many ways. Modern humans spend much time seated in chairs, disrupting the proper flow of qi to the legs. The gentle pummeling spreads the qi to the surrounding tissue, helping build muscle and preventing cramps. The meridians of the leg are responsible for digestion and absorption of nutrients. Stimulating them builds qi. Bending of the spine benefits the nervous system and maintains flexibility.

LEG GROUP

3. Unite Yin and Yang 2

When reaching the knee, gently pummel around the kneecap, placing one hand above medially, one below laterally, then one above laterally, one below medially, alternating strokes.

Continue by bending forward, pummeling down the leg to the ankle (or as far as you can comfortable reach) on the outside and inside of the leg.

Finish by raising the leg and rotating. Rotate leg and foot nine times in both directions.

Repeat on the other leg.



Continuing from the previous explanation, stimulating around the knee prevents damage to this important joint and the pummeling of the inside and outside of the leg balances yin and yang ensuring an even stride.

When you finish with the first leg, pause a moment and compare sensations in the legs. You should feel a strong difference. When you finish both legs, feel the invigorating sensations. You may find that not only do your legs feel “awake,” but that your entire body feels energized.

STOMACH GROUP

1. Earth good, all good

Place palms one on top of the other (it does not matter which is on top) over the dan tien (the area between the navel and the pubic bone). While moving slowly, rub in a clockwise circle around the dan tien 36 times.



The Dan Tien is the energetic center of the body. The Classic of Difficulties says “below the navel is the moving qi between the kidneys.” This is our fundamental inherited energy (yuan-source qi). Stimulating it will energize and harmonize the body.

The exercise is performed clockwise because that is the direction of movement of the intestine. This movement will aid in digestion. If diarrhea is present, perform the movement counter-clockwise.

BACK TO FRONT GROUP

1. Nourish low back

Place the palms of each hand over the kidneys and rub in opposing circles up, then in, then down, then out.
Repeat 36 times.



In Chinese Medicine, the kidneys are the storehouse of inherited energy. They are responsible for longevity, reproductive health and supporting the back. This maneuver strengthens that fundamental Qi.

BACK TO FRONT GROUP

2. Tonify front

Place the palms on the chest and rub downward along the front of the body 36 times
Repeat along the side of the rib cage.



This exercise prevents adversely raising digestive qi and liver qi that can result in heartburn, nausea, headaches, and eye problems. By lowering the ‘counterflow’ qi, it will help ground you.

IN CONCLUSION:

Qigong is a powerful tool to enhance health and wellbeing in daily living. This simple set of movements bridges the gap between basic self massage and “pure” energy meditation.

The exercises are performed in a seated posture and are not strenuous. As such, they can be performed by most people at all ages. There exist many styles and forms of qigong practice, ranging from basic health maintenance to advanced spiritual attainment and martial prowess. Many of the more advanced forms may prove to be dangerous for some individuals and require close supervision by an experienced instructor. This simple basic set can be practiced easily and safely and provides a good foundation for other qigong practices.