

Joyful Movement Qigong



Instructor Nicole Stone ~ <https://www.joyfulmovementqigong.com/>

Nicole teaches Tai Chi Qigong on Thursdays 10:30-11:45 am at Alameda Island Yoga, 1136 Ballena Blvd Ste D, and Qigong and Meditation on Friday nights 7:30-9 pm at Alameda Community Acupuncture, 1716 Lincoln Ave. She is available for Private Instruction and also gives private Qigong Healing Sessions. See her website for details.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is qigong? (or “chi kung”)

Qigong is an ancient Chinese health practice, dating back as much as 5,000 years. The name derives from the Mandarin words *Qi* (pronounced “chee”) meaning life-energy or breath or animating force, and *Gong*, meaning work or skill. Qigong is therefore a practice of accumulating and cultivating vital life-force energy in the body. Along with acupuncture, herbs, massage, and nutrition, qigong is a branch of Chinese Medicine.

Some people break down Qigong into three main schools: martial, medical, and spiritual. *Martial qigong* (like Tai Chi) is used to increase strength, flexibility and balance by bringing qi into the muscles, bones, and tendons through specifically designed routines. *Medical qigong* strengthens the body's organs, tissues, and systems for the purpose of achieving optimal health and longevity. *Spiritual qigong* focuses on deepening one's awareness in the present moment which supports the practices of meditation and self-inquiry. ***Joyful Movement Qigong*** lies at the intersection of medical and spiritual qigong and is practiced for the purpose of calming the nervous system, awakening our embodied awareness, and increasing vitality and sense of aliveness within our Being.

What are the benefits of Qigong?

The regular practice of qigong has been linked to stress relief, improved circulation, improved digestion, better joint mobility, improved physical strength, lowered blood pressure, reduced chronic pain, improved immunity, improved balance, improved mental focus, greater bone density, improved mood, and spiritual enrichment.

How does Qigong work?

Qigong is based on the premise that the human body is a *qi matrix*, or energy system. As long as the body has *qi*, it is alive; when *qi* is gone, it is dead. Tapping into the body's innate ability to repair itself, Qigong improves health by affecting the *qi*. Qigong cleanses the qi of impurities, pathogens and toxins, gathers the qi from the environment to cultivate *qi* in the body, and circulates the qi, opening places of blockage. As qi moves, it becomes clearer and healthier, like a rapidly flowing mountain stream. As the qigong practitioner progresses, she learns to sense *qi* in the body-- detecting when it is depleted, excessive or stagnant.

What are the basic principles of Qigong?

Qigong is composed of three essential aspects: (1) physical posture and movement, (2) breath, and

(3) mental focus. In qigong class, we work on a well-aligned posture to allow the body's energy to flow more freely, full abdominal breathing to calm the nervous system and provide the cells with more oxygen to use as fuel, and guided intention which involves focusing the mind on specific images, such as visualizing energy flowing to specific organs, sensing the weight of the pelvis supported by the earth or imagining the moisture from the earth fill up the inner legs like rising sap in a tree trunk.

The Three Essential Aspects of Qigong: Body, Breath, and Mind

Practicing the Three Essential Aspects of Qigong can immediately affect the quality of one's life. By attending to our body, breath, and mind, a sense of spaciousness is cultivated in our individual consciousness which allows for new possibilities to arise. The body, breath and mind are so intimately connected (and in fact not separate at all) that *if one of them constricts, the others do as well*. For example, if our body is compressed, the breath and mind become compressed as well. Conversely, if our thinking becomes tightly-bound, our body and breath become tightly bound as well. Constriction in any of these Three Aspects limits our ability to be present and resourceful in our everyday experiences. By attending to our body, breath, and mind, the practice of Qigong helps us notice when we are in a stress-response (tensing muscles, shallow breathing, clenching jaw, increasing heart rate, compulsive thinking, numbing our feelings, over-reacting, etc.)

Not only does Qigong open our awareness so that we can notice our stress responses, it also directly works with the parasympathetic nervous system, activating our relaxation response. Tapping into a state of relaxation on a regular basis strengthens our ability to switch over to "rest, digest and repair" mode in our everyday lives. Qigong can help us feel calm, centered, and alert and therefore, capable of making harmonious decisions. The key to attaining relaxation is what the Daoists call "doing without doing." *In Qigong, we practice balancing dance between efforting and effortlessness.*

Body: Basic Standing Pose "Wuji Posture" (see next page for diagram)

- Feet: Stand with feet parallel, shoulders' distance apart, evenly weighted between the ball and heel with more weight on the inside (first 3 toes & inside half of heel). Soften soles and connect to Earth (*Yin*).
- Ankles: Relax and soften.
- Knees: Relax the knee joint so that knees align directly over feet and are slightly bent, not locked.
- Low Back: Open and expand the low back by feeling your sacrum sinking, imagining your tailbone anchoring into the ground. Loosen your buttocks, back, waist and hips. Give kidneys space and breath.
- Chest and Arms: Be neutral and relaxed in your chest- no puffing out or depressing inward. Elbows are heavy and slightly bent. Imagine a small air bubble in your armpits so energy can flow. With palms facing back, the fingers spread and gently reach toward the earth.
- Head and Neck: Feel your cervical spine lengthen and the very top of your head growing up toward the Heaven (*Yang*). With a relaxed jaw, the chin tucks in slightly, and the face is soft.
- Mouth and Tongue: The mouth closes and the tongue relaxes against the upper palate behind your teeth. This position generates saliva to moisten the mouth and it also connects the two major energy channels in the body, the *Ren* and *Du* channels. Breathe through the nostrils.
- Eyes: Close your eyes or leave them open with a soft gaze at the horizon without focusing on anything in particular. Your inner eye is aware of your bodily sensations.
- Spine: Feel your spine elongate with each inhale- reaching down with the tailbone and up with the crown of the head. Feel space in each spinal segment.
- Front Body: With each exhale, imagine tension flowing downwards, like water. Relax into the softness.

Breath: Abdominal Breathing (see diagram on last page)

Breathing is the direct link to the nervous system and our mentality. In Qigong, we practice slow, deep abdominal breathing to relieve stress and recharge our body's energy levels.

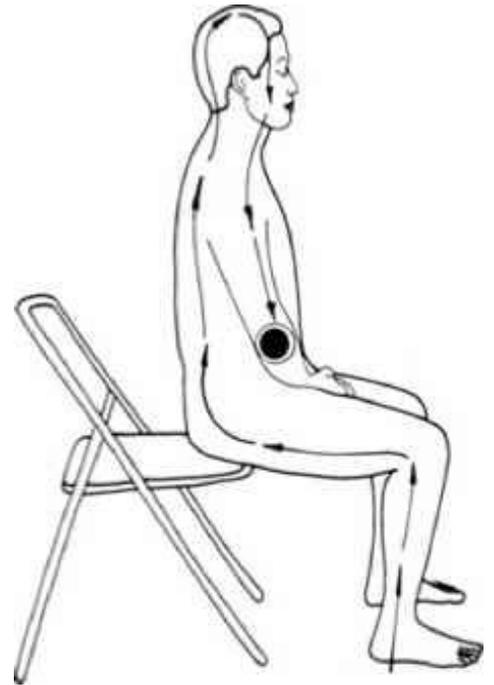
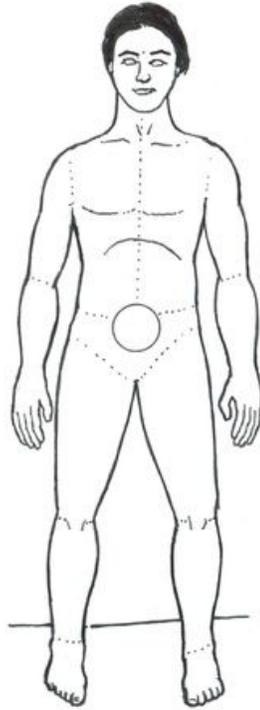
- Stand or sit in *wuji* posture. You can also lie down on your back with your hands on your belly.
- Breathe in through the nose, out through the mouth. Then, breathe in and out only through your nose.
- Inhale slowly and deeply: allow your belly, low back and sides to expand like a balloon being inflated.
- Exhale fully: intend your belly, low back and sides to condense, expelling the air and waste products.
- Breathe slowly, smoothly, deeply and evenly. Relax your entire body.
- With every in-breath, imagine your body being filled with vitality and energy. With every out-breath, imagine every cell of your body releasing tension.

Mind: Attention, Intention and Imagination

In Qigong, we actively use our attention, intention and imagination. For example, we attend to our belly and breath, intend or guide qi to specific areas of our body, and visualize images that influence the quality of our movement. *Where the mind goes, the qi flows.* Focusing our mind calms the emotions and reduces the perceptions of discomfort in the body. The novice practitioner may find it difficult to keep her mind focused while practicing qigong, however this skill can be developed through consistent practice.

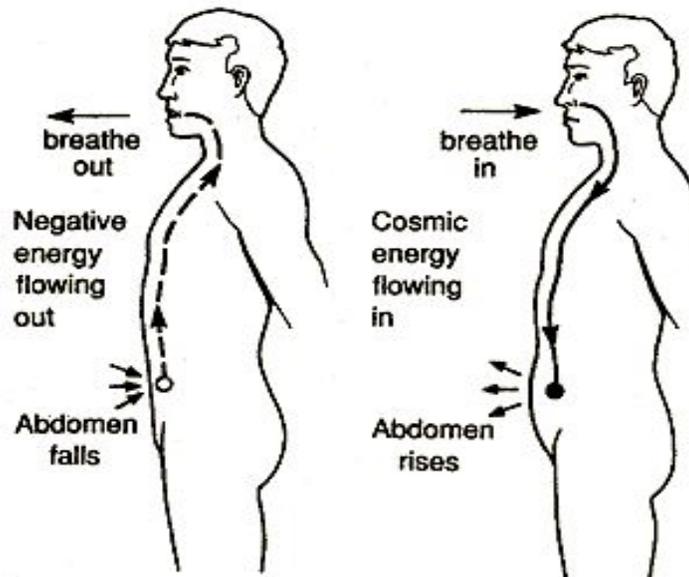
The Qigong State: When we attend to The Three Essential Aspects of Qigong, we enter a state of quiet awareness of the present moment. This is called *The Qigong State*. In this state, you are not concentrating on anything in particular, but rather on the entire field of your being, including both perceptions and sensations. In this state, we let our thoughts, emotions and mental images pass like clouds, neither rejecting or latching onto them. In this way, we become the spacious presence that welcomes everything that arises in our experience. Our minds can open like the sky. And as our minds expand, we are able to perceive the world accurately and know ourselves intimately.

Wuji Posture, Standing and Seated:



Abdominal Breathing

The Rise and Fall of the Abdomen



Exhale: Belly draws in, condensing

Inhale: Belly expands out like a balloon

The Three Dantiens: Energy Centers of the Body

Upper Dantien: Head Center

Middle Dantien: Heart Center

Lower Dantien: Belly Center

