

# Joyful Movement Qigong



## Frequently Asked Questions

### ***What is qigong?***

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 force-energy, and *Gong*, meaning work or skill. Qigong is therefore a practice of accumulating and cultivating vital life-force energy in the body. (Qigong is also written as “chi kung”). 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, as well as lessening the effects of aging. *Spiritual qigong* focuses on deepening one's awareness in the present moment as well as enhancing spiritual practices such as meditation. *Joyful Movement Qigong* lies at the intersection of *medical qigong* and *spiritual qigong* and is practiced for the purpose of calming the mind, increasing vitality, and awakening our embodied awareness.

### ***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 create *qi* reservoirs 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 turbid, depleted, excessive or stagnant.

### ***What are the basic principles of Qigong?***

Qigong is composed of three essential aspects: (1) physical movement, (2) breath, (3) mental focus. In qigong class, we work on 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 things, such as visualizing energy flowing to specific organs or sensing your body weight pouring into the earth.

## The Three Fundamentals of Qigong: *Body, Breath, and Mind*

Practicing The Three Fundamentals 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 tight, compressed and misaligned, the breath and mind become tight, compressed and misaligned as well. Constriction in any of these Three Fundamentals 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, increasing heart rate, shallow breathing, compulsive thinking, numbing our feelings, etc).

Not only does Qigong train our awareness, it also activates the relaxation response of the parasympathetic autonomic nervous system. Tapping into this state of relaxation on a regular basis strengthens our ability to switch over to "rest and digest" mode-- to feeling calm and centered, yet also alert and capable of making harmonious decisions. The key to attaining relaxation is what the Daoists call "doing without doing." *In Qigong, we practice finding the balance between effort and effortlessness.*

### **Body: Basic Standing Pose "Wuji Posture" or "Preliminary Posture" (see next page for diagram)**

- Feet: Stand with feet shoulders' distance apart, toes pointing forward, and weight just forward of center toward the ball of the foot. Soften and energetically root your feet deep into the ground.
- Knees: Relax the knee joint so that the knees align directly over feet and are slightly bent, not locked.
- Low Back: Open the low back by feeling your sacrum sinking and imagining your tailbone anchoring deep into the ground. Loosen your buttocks, back, waist and hips.
- 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 the thighs, the fingers spread and gently reach toward the earth.
- Head: Feel the upper back of your head and the very top of your head growing up toward the heavens. With a relaxed jaw, the chin tucks in slightly.
- 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 breath- reaching down with the tailbone and up with the crown of the head. Feel space in each spinal segment.
- Relax: Imagine any tension flowing downwards, like water. Soften and breathe.

### **Breath: Abdominal Breathing**

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

- Stand in *wuji* standing or sitting posture.
- Breathe 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 contract, expelling the air and waste products from your lungs.
- Breathe slowly and smoothly. Relax your entire body.
- With every in-breath, imagine your body being filled with vitality and energy. With every out-breath, imagine every muscle and cell of your body releasing tension.

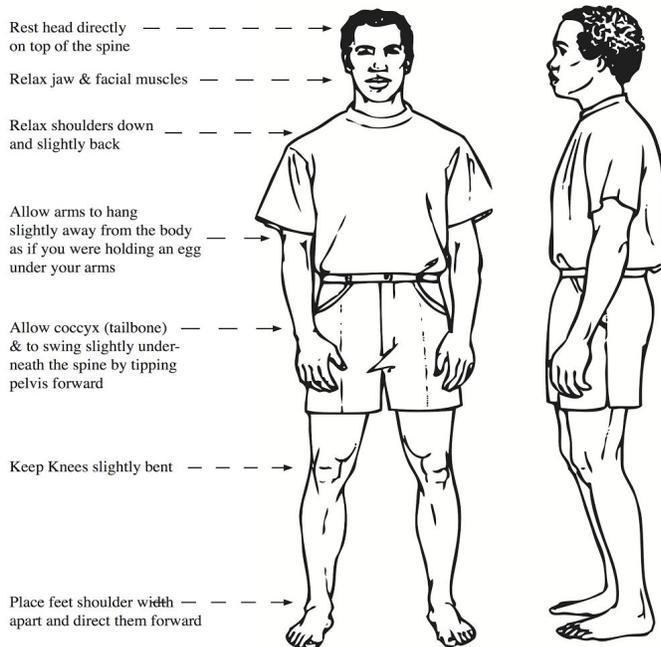
**Mind: Attention, Intention and Imagination**

In Qigong, we actively use our attention, intention and imagination. For example, we use our minds to attend to our belly and breath, to intend or guide qi to specific areas of our body, and to visualize images that influence the quality of our movement. In other words, 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 is easily developed through consistent practice.

**The Qigong State:** When we attend to The Three Fundamentals 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 being, including both perceptions and sensations. In this state, we let our thoughts pass like clouds, neither rejecting or latching onto them. In this way, we become the spacious presence that accepts everything that arises in our experience. Our minds become still and open, expanding our awareness and enabling us to perceive accurately and know ourselves with intimacy.

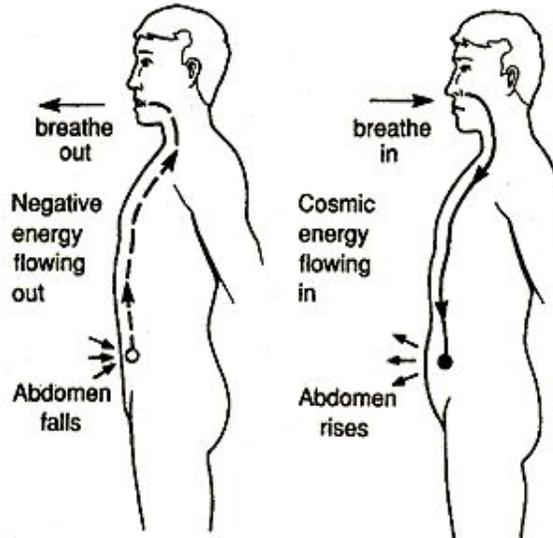
**The Preliminary Posture**

Simply shifting to this position has an effect on brain chemistry because you have to relax to concentrate on arranging the body parts. The adjustment of the body to this preliminary posture optimizes the function of all organs and maximizes breath flow throughout the body.



# Full Abdominal Breathing

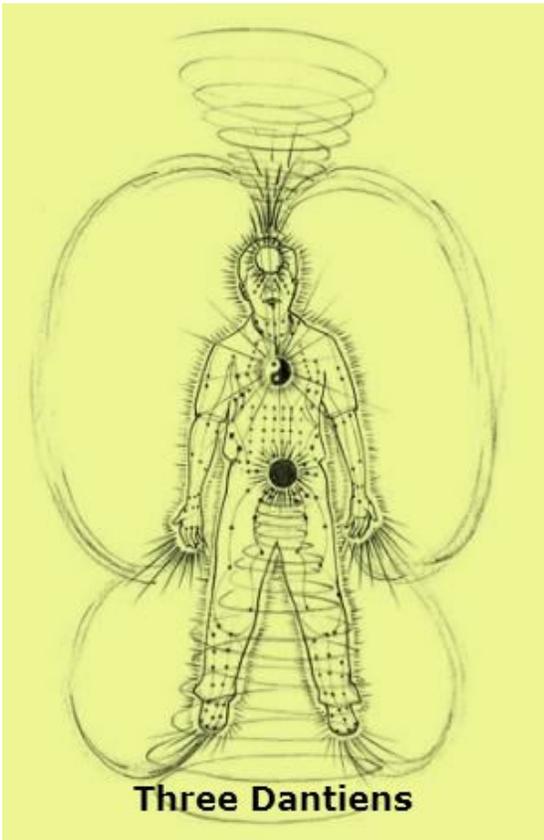
*The Rise and Fall of the Abdomen*



Exhale: Belly contracts

in Inhale: Belly expands out

# The Energy Centers of the Body



Upper Dantian

Middle Dantian

Lower Dantian