

An Introduction to Medical Qi Gong

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The ancient practice of *qi gong* is a treasure of Chinese culture focused on creating health and vitality. It has a long history and was found among the oldest Chinese medical texts in the *Ma Wangdui* tombs, which dates to the Warring States period of the *Zhou* Dynasty, 475 B.C. to 221 B.C. In these ancient tombs there are more than 40 illustrations of humans performing qi gong movements.

The name *qi gong* is a modern term for an ancient practice; the original name is *dao yin*. The word *dao* means to guide and *yin* means inward, *dao yin* are practices that guide inward. Other translations of *dao yin* are guiding and stretching or stretching and breath practices. The term *qi gong* can be defined as energy practices, energy cultivation or energy mastery, it includes practices that can influence the three treasures: *jing*, *qi*, *shen* or body, mind, spirit. Medical *qi gong* (MQG) is a branch of *qi gong* and can be defined as *qi gong* practices that are designed to influence specific areas or functions of the body, including channels, vital substances, organs, glands and energy centers. Medical *qi gong* should include three adjustments (1) ; they are three ways to influence the three treasures.

Three Adjustments:

1. Body posture.
2. Breathing method.
3. Intention, focus.

A primary objective of MQG is to use the three adjustments to influence corresponding channels, organs and vital substances related to pathogenic factors and medical conditions. The three adjustments of MQG should be included in every medical qi gong practice. A skilled practitioner will be able to explain how these three principles are applied to MQG; this knowledge increases the intention and effectiveness of the practice. As Chinese medical knowledge grew from its origin in the *Zhou* Dynasty, the relationship between medicine and qi gong expanded providing a sophisticated way to understand how these practices influence a person.

Many of the most influential medical practitioners in Chinese history included *qi gong* in their practices, including *Hua Tuo*, *Ge Hong*, *Tao Hongjing* and *Li Shizhen*. *Hua Tuo* is famous for promoting one of the oldest known qi gong systems, the "*Animal Frolics*," which mimic the movements of the tiger, bear, deer, crane and monkey. It is one of the most common *qi gong* forms practiced around the world. *Ge Hong* is renowned for writing the *Bao Pu Zi*, a collection of the known qi gong practices up to his time; he was a major contributor to *Nei Gong* (inner-alchemy) and is known for applying internal alchemy into the practice of acupuncture. *Tao Hongjing* is often referenced as the major promoter of the healing sounds, many view him as the first to organize and present *San Ching Taoism* as a clear and organized tradition. He is very famous for creating the first comprehensive materia medica, "*The Divine Farmer's Materia Medica*," and assigning the name *Shen Nong* to its origin, *Shen Nong Ben Cao Jing*. *Li Shizhen* emphasized it is essential to practice *qi gong* to directly

experience the eight extraordinary channels. This internal *qi gong* experience allows one to understand how the eight extraordinary channels function and develop the ability to perceive their current condition, which becomes part of the diagnostic model and contributes towards understanding how to apply them in clinical practice.

The term *qi gong* was made popular and became part of Chinese mainstream culture by Liu Guizhen in the 1950s, he was famous for teaching *nieyang-gong* (inner-nourishing *qi gong*), at this time the word *qi gong* became the standard term for many *dao yin* practices. There are many branches or styles under the name *qi gong*; one of them is medical *qi gong* (MQG). There are standing, sitting and laying *qi gong*, as well as static and dynamic *qi gong*, there are hundreds of *qi gong* forms when variations of the same forms are counted. Why variations of the same form? One reason is modifying forms to fit different people. A form a teenager can perform maybe one a middle-aged or elderly person cannot practice; a healthy person may be able to perform certain movements that an ill person cannot. Forms are modified to customize movements for each individual, allowing any person the opportunity to practice medical *qi gong*. In addition to *qi gong* that a person practices, there is external MQG or emitting *qi gong*, this is when a practitioner emits *qi* to a patient. This can clear excesses and blockages, circulate *qi* and blood or reinforce organ systems. When a patient can practice MQG at home they can perform self-healing a few times a day without the need of a practitioner being present and with the freedom to practice at times suitable to their schedule.

One of the unique aspects of MQG is that it is based on the relationship between the three adjustments: posture, breath and intention and the Chinese medical view of the human body and its channels, vital substances and energy centers. The deeper our understanding of these Chinese medical principles, the more effective is our ability to select specific MQG for each person and their condition.

The *Nei Jing*, the inner-classic of Chinese medicine presents a unique understanding of the human body and the entire acupuncture channel system. It includes five major acupuncture channels: sinew, luo, primary, divergent and extraordinary channels. Each of these channels corresponds to specific anatomical layers, energetic layers, vital substances and pathogens. Treating a specific channel system would more effectively treat a specific condition than trying to use one channel system to treat imbalances in all of them. A very interesting example of how *qi gong* was applied to the practice of Chinese medicine is the ancient art of *dao yin*. In modern times *dao yin* is often associated with yoga-like practices. It seems practitioners of *An Mo*, the original word for the healing practice *Tui Na*, evaluated the postures and movements of *dao yin* and applied them to *An Mo* and sinew channel treatments. Prescribing these *dao yin* movements to patients based on sinew channel diagnosis is a high form or medical *qi gong*; it allows a patient to do daily self-treatments that enhance traditional treatments.

An example of how to apply *dao yin* to sinew channels and muscular skeletal conditions includes, The River Flows Into the Valley *Dao Yin* (2). A sinew channel release is a movement that releases areas of the body to allow sinew channel treatments to be more effective (3). In this movement Du 14 is released, which includes the cervical and spinal areas and the associated sinew channels in the region. This *dao yin* creates a gentle rhythmic movement on the cervical and spinal regions; most patients can perform this movement. This *dao yin* posture focuses on the spinal and cervical regions, releasing the sinew channels with primarily forward and backward movement. Inhaling, press the sacrum and lower back to the ground and gently lift from the middle thoracic and cervical area, the movement is bottom to top. Hold the breath as the head is extended forward, then exhale and move back to the original position from top to bottom, vertebrae by vertebrae. This *dao yin* can be practiced at home to support

in office treatments or as a preventative medical *qi gong*, it can also be prescribed for general cervical conditions or part of a more sophisticated sinew channel treatment, integrating MQG and Chinese medicine. This *dao yin* is for presentation purposes only; please consult your licensed healthcare provider before practicing any MQG.

A recent study on yoga (*dao yin*) showed encouraging results for yoga treating fibromyalgia. The Oregon Health and Science University led by Dr. James Carson, a clinical psychologist and pain specialist, conducted the study. It suggests yoga had better results in relieving symptoms of fibromyalgia than known standard treatments, the details of the study can be found in a print issue of PAIN4.

References

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Editor's Note: This is the first article for our new column on medical *qi gong*. The history, practices, current research and interviews with practitioners and researchers will be presented in this medical *qi gong* column every month.

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