

# Entering Health Qigong

Popular Science Series on Health Qigong

Edited by Chinese Health Qigong Association

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### ***Editor's Note***

For the dedicated qigong practitioner, this book is a valuable gem indeed. The information it provides can accelerate the journey of our practice in at least four ways:

- It gives specific guidelines for getting the most benefit from practice. All practitioners of qigong can benefit from taking these precepts to heart.
- It provides conceptual tools, important for approaching and thinking about our qigong practice with an appropriate understanding and attitude.
- One of the precepts of qigong practice is “Improve Theoretical Understanding and Cultivate Scientific Awareness”. Studying this book goes towards fulfilling this precept.
- Certainly not least in importance, this book provides an abundance of inspiration to practice by delivering loudly and clearly the good news that we can all use the power of our minds and self-directed exercise to overcome illness and generate abundant health, as recorded since ancient times and confirmed by modern science, helping to spark off a virtuous cycle of health preservation!

Don't let the value that this book can provide go to waste. Read it, certainly, but don't stop there. Internalize it in your practice (start practicing if you don't already) and embody it in your daily life. Then share the knowledge you have gained. Encourage others to read it and join you in your practice.

Here's to a healthier, happier, more beautiful world.

Dane Dormio

San Diego, California, USA

October 2009

## ***Opening Words***

Chinese General Secretary Hu Jintao clearly advocates the traditional “eight honors and eight disgraces” as the main focus of the Socialist ideology. This philosophy offers guidance and strengthens the moral values of the Chinese people, as well as lays a foundation for a harmonious progression into the future. One of the eight honors, “To take pride in upholding science, and to be shameful of ignorance”, has a strong guiding message for today's society and people. It bestows a responsibility to spread scientific knowledge, master scientific methods, establish and improve scientific thinking, and in all other ways to uphold the spirit of science. Such a progression, it is hoped, will lead in the direction of a public that is better able to distinguish between science and superstition, as well as between progress and regression.

Health qigong is a traditional national sport. Its main form of exercise is a combination of physical activities that cater to the needs of breathing and psychological adjustment. It is a key component of Chinese culture. For thousands of years, it has been very popular, owing to its health benefits and ease of practice. Its gentle, soft, and slow movements make it suitable for young and old alike.

In recent years the popularity of health qigong has grown. With its diverse expressions and unique charm, Four Set Health Qigong has captured the attention of practitioners from across China and the globe. It has become a picturesque part of the landscape of Chinese national fitness.

As Four Set Health Qigong has become more publicly known, curiosity has grown. More people want to know about its unique features, what it is and how it is different from other types of qigong, as well as about its benefits and best methods of practice.

Theory guides action. Mastering scientific concepts and methods of fitness can not only foster health and happiness for the individual, but also promote the harmony and progress of society. Conversely, lacking a scientific understanding can cause confusion. Learning about the underlying theory is central to benefiting from health qigong. Promoting the scientific concepts inherent to this form of exercise beautifully upholds the “eight honors and eight disgraces” ideology.

This book is intended to help the reader understand what health qigong is all about using non-technical terminology. Its chapters fall into three main sections. Chapters 1, 2, and 3 provide an overview of the world health situation and how health qigong fits into it, and also lay the conceptual groundwork necessary for understanding health qigong. They make a good quick introduction for beginners. Chapters 4 and 5 introduce Four Set Health Qigong and outline its features and benefits. Chapters 6, 7, 8, and 9 detail the scientifically documented health benefits of Four Set Health Qigong and provide a thorough set of guidelines for progressing in one's own practice.

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# **Chapter 1 General Overviews**

## ***Health, Sub-health, and Disease***

### **Definition of Health**

Health is the first form of wealth. Without health, money cannot be enjoyed, and dreams cannot be realized regardless of aggressiveness and capability. Without health, lasting happiness and quality of life are impossible to achieve.

Health is also the wealth of a society. In 2001, China's total consumption of health care resources cost .614 trillion, accounting for 6.4% of the GDP. The sum of financial losses resulting from disease, disability, and premature death was .78 trillion, or 8.2% of the GDP. The combined cost of these was 1.4 trillion, or 14.6% of the GDP. What should be troubling is that in recent years the growth rate of this figure has exceeded the growth rate of the national economy and per capita income. For the sake of comparison to the 1.4 trillion spent on health related costs in 2001, the total cost of the famous Three Gorges 15-year project is only .2 trillion; the total cost of the 50 year Cross-Century Project combined with the South-North Water Diversion Project is only .5 trillion. Both of these figures are dwarfed by the amount spent on health related costs in a single year. More importantly, health problems exacerbate poverty and cause immeasurable physical pain. The growing medical problem has thus become a hot spot of society as well as a focus of government policies.

The definition of health given by the World Health Organization (WHO) is: "Health is not only an absence of illness but also a sound physical, mental, and social state."

Some of the physical attributes associated with good health are the following: body systems are operating normally, weight is appropriate, eyes and eyelids are bright and sharp, without inflammation, teeth are clean and without defects or pain or bleeding of the gums, hair is thick and without dandruff, muscles are flexible and skin is elastic, the step is light while walking, energy is steady throughout the day, resistance to illness and infection is strong, and the person is adaptable to various environments, outdoors and indoors.

Good health also encompasses the personality: stable emotions, a moderate character, a strong will with rich feelings, an open mind, an active, optimistic attitude, a willingness to bear responsibilities, and a generous heart.

A healthy personality bestows a strong ability to deal with anything that comes, to be objective and realistic while observing problems, to maintain self discipline in the face of adversity, to deal with emergencies, and to adapt to a complex social environment. A healthy personality invokes good interpersonal relationships and is obliging, kind, and compassionate towards others.

Good health requires positive habits, including a regular schedule. This means not only making good use of working time, but also making adequate arrangements for rest and recreation. It is important to have meaningful work that keeps you busy but doesn't lead to overly stressed states or chaos, as well as sufficient leisure and relaxation. Good health habits also include not harming yourself by overindulging in pleasures, but rather implementing the discipline of moderation.

## **Health and Disease**

Health is a difficult concept to measure objectively. A person can only be considered healthy if certain elements of well being exist, but absolute health must be an ideal that can never be truly achieved. The WHO's definition of "health" has captured this property.

For a long time it was held that health is a state without disease, but this view is very limiting because it inevitably leaves a gap for disease to foster. A more beneficial concept of health is a state of happiness and enjoyment of life. This view both provides direction for growth as well as making good health easier to assess. Thus the Chinese saying: "Health is like water in a well. The importance of the water can never be realized until the well is dry."

A tendency many people have is to magnify whatever disease may be present in their body by feeding it with anxiety and worry. People who panic upon hearing bad news about their health often make the situation worse.

Other people tend to live in a fantastic inner world, but never face reality on its own terms. These people may have strong ambitions to create a beautiful life but lack the courage to bring them to fruition. This type of introverted person may go through a physical examination and find nothing wrong with their body, and thus be incorrectly labeled "healthy", but natural confidence and courage are elements of good health. Health needs to be measured by how a person feels and performs as well as by how well their physical body functions.

Moderation is one powerful key to living a happy life. Too much of anything can be destructive. Thus maintaining optimum health demands responsibility in the form of being able to objectively see and consciously separate the passions of the body and the discipline of the mind. This form of responsibility makes it easier to make healthy, positive choices.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people are paying more and more attention to their own health, and the focus of their attention is shifting from medical treatment to disease prevention. This consciousness shift is a step in the right direction. Everyone deserves to be healthy. Maintaining and increasing health requires a new perception of health as alive and ever changing. This attitude makes it easier to respond to the requirements of maintaining good health. The pursuit of medicine in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is not about treating illness better, but about helping people lead healthier lives, and especially helping old people lead healthier lives.

## **Definition of Sub-Health**

As medical knowledge has progressed, a new concept has emerged called sub-health that transcends previously existing concepts of wellness and disease. The concept originates in the mid 1980s with the work of a Soviet scholar, N. Buheman, whose research indicated the existence of an intermediate state of the human being between health and illness. This concept is accommodated by the WHO's definition of health, which acknowledges that health is more than the lack of disease. The state of sub-health is also known as the "third state", "pre-disease state", or the "preclinical period". A state of sub-health is indicated by "three declines" (declines of energy, responsiveness, and adaptability), "three highs and one low" (hyperlipidemia, hyperglycemia, high blood viscosity, and lowered immunity), and "symptoms of five diseases" (obesity, high blood pressure, coronary heart disease, diabetes, and stroke). A global survey by the WHO concluded that while healthy people make up 5% of the population and diseased people make up 20%, the rest of us, 75%, are sub-healthy.

Fortunately, sub-health has a simple cause and a simple remedy: diet and lifestyle habits. Many of the health challenges found in China revolve around diet. As China modernizes it adopts more and more a Western diet, with a high fat and cholesterol content and unbalanced nutrition. Over time, such a diet can lead to diseases of civilization characterized by the "three highs" (high blood pressure, hyperglycemia, and high BMI), especially for middle aged and older people. Furthermore, the more time we spend in work settings as opposed to natural settings, the more our exercise habits tend to suffer. According to studies the number of sub-healthy people in China exceeds .7 billion, accounting for 60% to 70% of the population. A study of 16 Chinese metropolitan areas concluded that the highest rate of sub-health is in Beijing, at 75%, closely followed by Shanghai and Guangdong, which are at 73%.

## **Sub-health and Disease**

Sub-health itself is not a disease, but it coincides with the process of cumulative and gradual changes that often take place before a disease breaks out. Sometimes it is used to refer to a condition leading up to a disease, but the term is more appropriately used to represent a range, or spectrum, of conditions intermediate between wellness and illness. A person in a state of sub-health may be moving in either direction, moving into either better or worse health.

Other research indicates that 48% of workers within 10 major cities are considered to be in a condition of deteriorating health. The percentage is generally higher in coastal cities and less so in inland cities. Also, the rate tends to be higher among employees who do mostly "brain" work as compared with employees who do more physical work, and higher among middle aged people than among younger people.

The importance of being aware of the condition of sub-health as a scale can't be overestimated. It can provide guidance for individuals and groups to make health related

decisions, including when to seek professional help.

## **Senility and Life Expectancy**

The growth period of the human body peaks at a typical age of about 25, after which point the senility period may begin. Normal senility is a long but slow process.

From a biological perspective, the human body is capable of living about 120 years. So why is it that we seldom hear of people who live to be this age? This can largely be attributed to poor lifestyle habits. There are many factors which can influence lifespan. An obvious one is disasters, whether natural or artificial, but many diseases can also shorten life by accelerating the aging process. Even after recovering from a serious disease, the body may not be able to attain its former energy level.

Even common illnesses like colds and the flu can accelerate the aging process and lower the quality of life. Though such illnesses are not life threatening, they still erode the body's resources. Thus maintaining healthful living habits and having a strong immune system both help to increase lifespan.

In a decreasing state of sub-health, the human body is losing energy through fatigue. The mind may be in a constant state of anxiety, which contributes to the deterioration. This effect is often overlooked in western medicine, but it consumes energy and accelerates aging. Theoretically, the total number of heartbeats in a person's lifetime is fixed at about .2 trillion. If a person's heart often palpitates, as with tachycardia, it could be said that they are aging faster and shortening their lifespan.

Fatigue, anxiety, minor illnesses, and poor lifestyle habits are all detrimental to both the quality and length of life, and efforts made to minimize them will probably pay off in a happier, longer life for any individual.

## ***The Importance of Healing Exercises***

Worldwide, the economic burdens imposed by disease and sub-health are trending upwards. More and more individuals and governments in the western developed countries are seeking alternative types of medicine and therapy, such as Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), qigong, and other healing modalities that induce mental and physical balance, to compensate for the inadequacies of mainstream western medicine and to reduce the financial impact of disease and sub-health. The prevalence of sub-health has attracted broad attention from the medical profession. However, since sub-health is not a disease, western medicine, which is accustomed to designing treatments in accordance with pathological diseases, is not suited to address it.

On the other hand, many so-called “alternative” healing modalities, particularly TCM, are highly suited to addressing the issue of sub-health. These work outside the parameters of western medicine, incorporating biology, psychology, and society as integral facets of the individual's well-being. Such healing modalities, especially when coupled with healing exercises such as qigong, can improve health, prevent disease, improve the quality of life and slow aging. As an example, research indicates that a man who spends an hour or more per day walking has one fourth the risk of dying from cardiac ischemia as one who seldom exercises.

Obviously there is an important place in the world for exercises that are scientifically designed to work for anyone to increase health, or healing exercises, of which qigong would serve as an example. Healing exercises reduce tiredness and boost adaptability and endurance, thus lowering the likelihood for disease to set in. There is an ancient principle in TCM: “curing diseases before they happen”. Many supposed illnesses are actually just manifestations of sub-health.

Treatment of sub-health conditions must be both personal and scientific. Modern treatments are moving towards “personalized medicine”, according to which treatment plans are created according to the patient's individual situation, with the intention of maximizing the effects of the treatment. Moderate exercise plans, like “sports prescriptions” made by regular sports clubs, can be designed in accordance with the diversity of individual physical conditions. For example, eye exercises are important for middle and primary school students to prevent myopia, while body building exercises are important for computer operators to strengthen cervical vertebrae. Such plans are both personalized and scientifically designed. TCM has always stressed the variations among individuals and adapting treatments to suit the times and local conditions. Similarly, qigong exercises that are suitable for one person may not be suitable for someone in a much weaker state, so exercise routines are meant to be adapted to the individual practitioner.

## **Nipping Disease in the Bud**

The WHO has stated that carrying out “preventive health strategies” actually means reducing and preventing sub-health. The concept of prevention requires initiative. For example, taking the initiative to rest before you become tired prevents exhaustion, and drinking before you are thirsty prevents dehydration. Likewise, supplementing vitamins and microelements before diseases or symptoms of deficiency appear is both proactive and preventive. A sick body cannot absorb or use nutrients as readily as a healthy one can.

Healing exercise follows the same principle. A clever practitioner won't wait for signs of disease to appear, but rather will take the initiative to exercise in order to stay as far as possible from sub-health and disease.

## **Approaching Healing Exercises Systematically**

Healing exercises should be approached from a systematic and long-term perspective that incorporates psychology and lifestyle. Without these elements, healing exercises cannot achieve their greatest effect. Remember that Rome wasn't built in a day. The more closely you follow the principles and the longer you persist, the more apparent the benefits will become.

Healing exercises go hand in hand with a healthy personality and a healthy lifestyle. It is important to be able to relieve work stress and appreciate the fun in life without being either over-excited or over-anxious, and to maintain a regular schedule and a balanced diet. A balanced diet means minimizing salt and sugar and eating a wide variety of plants, vegetables, and aquatic foods that replenish the body's essential nutrients, vitamins, and microelements.

In the next section we will look at several common misunderstandings related to healing exercises.

### **Myths of Healing Exercises**

#### ***Healing Exercises Are a One-Time Cure***

Just as there is no panacea that cures every disease, there is no single way of exercising that is optimal for every person or that will provide permanent benefits. Health must be maintained by each individual. If healthful exercise and lifestyle habits are interrupted once begun, sub-health will silently begin to creep up. But once such habits are established, they are relatively easy to maintain, because they make you feel good!

#### ***If You Take the Right Supplements You Can be Healthy Without Exercising***

While it is true that supplements can help to strengthen a weakened body, nowadays some people are under the impression that being healthy is just a matter of taking the right supplements. But even a body with excellent nutrition still needs exercise. If you are feeling tired it is more likely to be due to a lack of exercise than to a lack of nutrition. Exercise is necessary because it makes you more resistant to both stress and fatigue, but what's more, without it the body's ability to use the nutritional resources available to it will be diminished. So supplements and exercise help to promote each other's effects.

Healing exercises are good for physical and mental health as well as for social harmony and stability. So let's get moving and take an active part in the national fitness craze!

## **Chapter 2 Understanding Health Qigong**

### ***Origin of Qigong***

Qigong is a traditional Chinese form of exercise for fitness and healing with a long, rich history. Qigong intersects with many other schools of philosophy and healing, such as Taoism's *tuna*, *fuqi*, *xingchi*, *neidan*, and *cunsi* practices; Buddhism's meditation, medicine's guidance, *anqiao*, and related prayers; and Confucianism's self-culturedness and *zuowang*. Qigong, due to its special charms such as being soft and slow and bestowing obvious health benefits to young and old, has been popular in various forms for thousands of years. Qigong is practiced not only in meditation sessions, but also in daily life and work. Among the qigong exercises are prototypes for most types of physical actions and methods of catering to the needs of the body and the breath.

As examples, consider how when people feel tired they often like to stretch out with both arms straight over their heads, which is an embryonic form of the exercise called *Ba Duan Jin*, or how when they are upset and exhausted they sometimes close their eyes to get a rest from vexation, which is characterized by the exercise known as “holding one's breath into silence”.

*Yuan Guan Jin Ze* and *Qu Xang Bi Lei* are not only very simple and direct means of recognizing everything in nature, but also the root source of theories such as harmony between humans and nature, the relative movement between dynamic and static states, the reciprocal growth and decline of yin and yang, and the generation and restraint of the Five Elements. Through constant investigation and summarization of such natural phenomena as the movements of the sun, moon, and stars, the changing of the sky, earth, wind, and clouds, and the movements of birds, fish, and worms, ancient people assigned meanings to all things. This is how the rich historical record of health qigong was collected, after repeated verification through observation of nature.

For example, in one ancient text, the *Guidance Map*, unearthed in Ma Wangdui of Changsha, Hu'nan, many of the movements recorded modeled those of animals: birds, bears, monkeys, wolves, apes, and even cockroaches. In the Dong Jin period, Ge Hong referred to Long Deng, Huyin, Xiongjing, Guiye, Yanfei, Shequ, Niaoshen, and Tujing in his *Bai Puzi-Zaying*. And of course, the most famous and representative qigong exercise set is the Five Birds Show, created by Hua Tuo in the Eastern Han Dynasty.

### ***Development of Qigong***

Archaeological research shows that qigong has a long history. In 1975 a relic from the Mijiavao period, a piece of colored pottery, was unearthed in the Ledu area of the Qinghai

province. It showed a portrait of a person whose upper body was male and whose lower body was female performing breath exercises. This is interpreted as showing that 5,000 years ago people were aware of the way of reconciling the yin and yang by means of regulating the breath.

Another precious cultural object related to Qigong is the *Xingqi Yupei Ming*. Famous Chinese scientist, writer, and archaeologist Mr. Guo Moruo interprets: "One should breathe deeply, so the qi reserved in the body will expand and stretch downwards, then after a pause, exhale the qi slowly, just like budding trees who grow upwards, opposite to the pull of gravity. One should continue exhaling until all the qi is expended. Thus, qi from the top moves up while qi from the bottom moves down. Obeying this one will live; disobeying, one dies." Mr. Guo believed that the inscription of the *Xingqi Yupei Ming* described a round of deep breathing to expand the qi. So far, historians aren't in agreement about the exact meaning of the text, but they agree that it refers to the practice of qigong.

Many ancient works of literature also contain rich expositions on qigong. The practice was recorded in the *Lushi Chunqiu Gu Yue* as follows: "From the times of Yao and Tang, central China often suffered floods. They would last a long time and the air would be very moist. Many people suffered problems with their skin and joints. Therefore they developed movements to exercise themselves." This text reveals that in the process of adapting to nature and the environment, ancient people created these exercises to strengthen tendons and bones, to improve circulation, and to preserve health.

During the Spring and Autumn Period, many schools of thought flourished. People were thoroughly reorganizing society and nature, and they were probing actively into the laws of life, birth, growth, and death with the intent of preserving health. *The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic*, written in this period, established a foundation for qigong, and the methods of Dao Yin, Fu Qi, Tu Na, and Xing Qi were adopted over time.

After the Qin dynasty integrated China, the ruling class encouraged the practice of qigong and the development of health preservation and immortality-seeking practices. Then, in the Eastern Han period, Buddhism was introduced to China along with some of its own doctrines and practices for self-cultivation and the preservation of health. Thus, qigong was able to be influenced by Buddhism as well as by Confucianism and Taoism.

Hua Tuo created the Five Birds Show, an exercise set mimicking the movements of tigers, deer, bears, apes, and birds. This was one of the earliest qigong sets for all around fitness.

Ge Hong's *Bao Puzi*, from the the Jin dynasty, and Tao Hongjing's *Subsistence Cultivation Record*, from the North and South Dynasties, also promoted the development of ancient qigong.

During the Sui Dynasty, the philosophies of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism were applied directly to the practice of medicine. The *Treatise on the Causes and Manifestations of Diseases* recorded over 260 Dao Yin methods for developing fitness and curing diseases. During the Tang Dynasty, Sun Simiao combined medicine, Taoism, and Buddhism in *Emergency Preparedness Prescription for Diseases* and *Supplement to Invaluable Prescriptions for Ready Reference*. He gave methods of recuperating qi and Dao Yin that were easy to learn and suitable for old people.

Throughout the Song, Yuan, Ming, and Qing Dynasties, medicine developed along with the philosophies of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, forming many rich tributaries among the schools of qigong.

In the past 30 years, qigong has entered a new stage. With tens of millions of people practicing and contributing to its development, many new qigong skills have been created in this time.

## ***Management of Health Qigong***

Qigong was first brought under government management in August 1996, for the purpose of guiding the healthy development of social qigong activities, promoting socialist ideological and ethical progress, and improving the health of the people. The relevant ministries jointly issued a document describing the concepts of “Social Qigong”, “Health Qigong”, and “Qigong Medical Care”. Social Qigong is “Health Qigong with other people”; “Qigong Medical Care” is the use of Qigong to cure diseases. In July of 2000, the Ministry of Health of the People's Republic of China changed the term “Qigong Medical Care” to “Medical Qigong”, in its publication *Provisional Regulations on the Management of Medical Qigong*.

Then in September of the same year, the State Sports General Administration further defined “health qigong” as “a traditional national sport” in its publication *Interim Measures for the Administration of Health Qigong*. The report states, “Its main form of exercise is a combination of physical activities designed to cater to the needs of the breath and psychological adjustment. It is a long-standing component of Chinese culture.” The Administration went on to establish the Health Qigong Association to promote the popularization of health qigong. Since this time, health qigong has undergone a continuing process of standardization.

## ***Key Elements of Health Qigong Practice***

A human being is composed of both body and mind. The harmonious coordination of these is necessary for health as well as the achievement of any objective we might pursue. In qigong theory, body and mind are represented as “entity” and “spirit”, with qi linking these to form an organic whole. Therefore, the life force of a person is a combination of entity, qi, and spirit, as has been written: “Body is the home of life; qi is the essence of life; Spirit is the master of life.”

Thus health qigong incorporates three forms of regulation, body regulation, breath regulation, and mind regulation, which correspond to the three parts of a human being. The “Three Regulations” form the basis of health qigong practice.

## **Body Regulation**

The basis of body regulation is to actively and consciously regulate the body's postures and movements to achieve the purposes of qigong. It is the foundation for breath regulation and mind regulation, and forms the basis of health qigong exercises. Traditional qigong practices which exercise the body and dignify the appearance belong to the category of body regulation.

### ***Methods of Body Regulation***

Body Regulation includes the regulation of the torso and four limbs, but it does not stop there. Every part of the body, including head, neck, shoulders, elbows, wrists, palms, fingers, chest, belly, sides, ribs, spine, back, waist, buttocks, hipbones, legs, knees, ankles, feet, toes, eyes, ears, nose, and tongue, has detailed requirements specified for its regulation. As an example, an exercise may specify standing in silence, relaxed, with eyes pointing forward, neck straight, spine vertical, shoulders and elbows drooping, waist relaxed, hipbones drooping, and the tongue pressed against the upper palate. All exercises, whether dynamic or static, involve the regulation of the entire body in such a manner.

### ***Requirements of Body Regulation***

The basic requirements for body regulation are proper posture and relaxation, whether walking, standing, sitting, lying, bending, stretching, bowing, running, or jumping. All movements should be smooth and comfortable, soft, relaxed, skillful, coherent, and attentive.

### ***Functions of Body Regulation***

- Body regulation forms the basis of breath regulation and mind regulation. There is an old saying, "If the posture is not proper, qi will not be smooth; if qi is not smooth, mind will not be peaceful; if mind is not peaceful, spirit will be messy." This points out the role of body regulation as the basis of practice, for only if the body is properly aligned and relaxed can the spirit be leisurely.
- Body regulation softens the muscle and strengthens the bones, which makes the body strong. "If one often exercises, the blood will flow smoothly and disease will not set in."

- Body regulation regulates the energy channels and blood flow. These are the systems which link the human body into a unified whole. Only if the energy channels are kept smooth and unobstructed can blood and nutrients move normally to maintain the health of the body.

## **Breath Regulation**

Breath regulation involves actively and consciously regulating and controlling the breath in terms of frequency, rhythm, and depth. Breath regulation is an important link in the practice of health qigong. In traditional qigong, exercises such as Tu Na, Exercising Qi, Recuperating Qi, Fu Qi, and Shi Qi all belong to the category of breath regulation.

### ***Methods of Breath Regulation***

There are many ways to regulate the breath in health qigong. Here we introduce several common ways.

- **Natural Breathing:** Health qigong beginners generally use a method of natural breathing, which moves in and out through the nose. Applying natural breathing in conjunction with qigong practice serves to unify entity, qi, and spirit.
- **Breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth:** This method of breathing often involves making a sound while exhaling and can be used as a way to relax before practice.
- **Abdominal breathing:** The two main ways of breathing are thorax breathing and abdominal breathing. Abdominal breathing can be subdivided into progressive and regressive. With progressive, or isovolumetric, breathing, the belly bulges on the inhale and hollows on the exhale. On the inhale, the abdominal muscle relaxes, the diaphragm muscle drops, and the abdominal wall gradually bulges; on the exhale, the abdominal muscle contracts, the diaphragm muscle rises, and the abdominal wall concaves. With regressive abdominal breathing, also known as Varactor breathing, the belly hollows on the inhale and bulges on the exhale. On the inhale, the abdominal muscle and abdominal wall contract while the diaphragm muscle contracts and drops, shrinking the capacity of the abdominal cavity. On the exhale, the abdominal muscle relaxes, the abdominal wall bulges, and the diaphragm muscle rises, expanding the capacity of the abdominal cavity. Regressive abdominal breathing massages and exercises the internal organs and is especially helpful for improving gastrointestinal function.
- **Perineal breathing:** On the in breath, the perineum muscle is contracted and lifted, and on the out breath it is relaxed.

## ***Requirements of Breath Regulation***

The basic requirements for breath regulation are that the breath be well-distributed, fine and closely woven, soft, and profound. But it is important to allow nature to take its course, proceeding gradually and avoiding mechanical copying. Breath regulation links body regulation and mind regulation. After sufficient practice, entity, qi, and spirit will naturally unify. Once this happens, the breath will naturally achieve the desired qualities.

## ***Functions of Breath Regulation***

- Breath regulation is the link between body regulation and mind regulation. On the one hand, maintaining a proper posture and a relaxed body allows one to be leisurely. On the other hand, being leisurely allows the breath to be smooth, the posture to be proper, and the body to be relaxed.
- Breath regulation exchanges stale air for fresh. This improves circulation, helps to regulate the functions of the tissues and organs, and enhances vitality.
- Breath regulation enhances circulation of the blood. Blood and qi are each other's moving impetus in the human body. "Qi is the commander of blood and blood is the mother of qi." Therefore, breath regulation simultaneously stimulates the development of qi and the circulation of the blood.
- Breath regulation strengthens the viscera and bowels. The saying "Exhaling heart and lungs and inhaling liver and kidney" refers to how the breath influences the body's organs. Modern medical research indicates that frequent breath regulation exercises can enlarge the range of the diaphragm muscle as well as accelerate the function of the internal organs, including the stomach.

## **Mind Regulation**

Mind regulation is the active and conscious regulation of one's attention and thoughts.

In some ways, mind regulation is the most important form of regulation, for it is consciousness that guides practice. Body regulation involves the movements and postures, while breath regulation involves the breath, but both can be practiced only with the guidance and participation of awareness. In traditional qigong, Yishou, Cunsi, Guankiang, Tiaoshen,

and Litany all belong to the category of mind regulation.

### ***Methods of Mind Regulation***

The flow of mind, consciousness, and thought is active and varied. There are many emotions, or states of mind, including joy and happiness as well as anger, gloom, anxiety, sadness, and panic. Therefore the forms of mind regulation are also varied, but they generally fall into two classes, Yishou and Cunxiang.

- Class of Yishou: “One thought instead of thousands of thoughts”. “Yi” is mind, “Shou” is not distracted; “Yishou” means to pay entire attention to one thing rather than being distracted by many thoughts. Yishou can be practiced in relation to parts of the body, such as hypogastrium, life gate, navel, Yongquan, and Baihui, or in relation to inanimate objects, such as the flame of a candle, a wall, or a flower.
- Class of Cunxiang: “One thought governs other thoughts”. Within the silent states of body regulation and breath regulation, the object the mind should be focused on is the procedure. In this manner one can get rid of distracting thoughts.

Common objects for the focusing of attention during the practice of Cunxi are movements and postures, the breath (counting, following, listening), the mind itself (thought and imagination), and things like the sea, the sky, clouds, the moon, poetry, or music.

### ***Requirements of Mind Regulation***

The basic requirement for mind regulation is to “be silent”. Yishou can be used in conjunction with movement and breathing to achieve unity of mind, qi, and body.

### ***Functions of Mind Regulation***

- Mind regulation promotes physical and mental health. The states achieved during practice, such as silent, relaxed, happy, and joyful, are helpful for regulating psychological and physiological functioning to achieve optimal health.
- Mind Regulation develops latent energy and enlarges wisdom. The ancients wrote, “Practicing qigong needs silence, and silence can produce wisdom”. Scientific research has confirmed that “silence” is helpful for developing latent energy and increasing wisdom as well

as improving the flexibility of the body, the agility of the mind, the stability of the emotions, attention, strength of will, observation, memory, self-control, and adaptability.

Mind regulation, breath regulation, and body regulation, corresponding to mind, qi, and entity, are fundamentally interrelated. Body regulation is the premise, breath regulation is the link, and mind regulation is the core as well as the ultimate aim of the “Three Regulations”. In the process of practice, following the qigong requirements is essential for achieving the integration of the “Three Regulations”.

# **Chapter 3 Health Qigong Concepts**

## ***Health Preservation***

### **Traditional Chinese Health Preservation**

Throughout the long course of its history, the Chinese nation has gradually come to understand the laws of human life and the essence of health as a result of continual investigation of nature, disease, and senility. From this continuing struggle has emerged a wide ranging, systematic, and distinctive body of knowledge and theory regarding human health known as Traditional Chinese Health Preservation (TCHP).

TCHP compares well with modern health preservation methods and is a shining star of traditional Chinese culture. It is a science that specializes in the prevention of human disease. Its aim is to keep people mentally and physically healthy, preventing degradation and senility, which contributes to long life and happiness. Throughout its thousands of years of development, generations of distinguished experts in medicine, literature, history, and philosophy have contributed to its rich and varied contents and methods.

### **Qigong Health Preservation**

Qigong health preservation is comprehensive and is guided by the theories of yin and yang (general terms for the opposing aspects of all matter and phenomena) and the five elements (metal, water, wood, fire, and earth). It is also informed by dialectical materialism as well as by the theory of activities of qi. Qigong, along with diet and medicine, are the three basic methods of health preservation.

There is a proverb that says: "Heaven has three treasures, including the sun, the moon, and the stars." Likewise, the Earth has water, fire, and wind, while a human has vital essence, qi, and mind. From qigong there is a saying that people should build vital essence, qi, and mind internally, and build bones, muscles, and skin externally. In a certain sense, the process of practicing qigong is that of continually cultivating and preserving vital essence, qi, and mind. These three elements are interrelated and mutually developed. They both sustain and restrain each other, forming a whole organic system. The coordination and unification of these three components sets the standard of health in qigong.

During the process of practicing qigong, the Five-chi, which refers to ghost, mind, idea, soul, and will, become relaxed and the collaterals become smooth due to the interdependence of breathing and mental activity and the corresponding relation of mental

activity and bodily activity. This relation can reach the realm of unity of physique and spirit, with the unity of idea and energy eventually following with long-term practice. This helps explain why qigong has been famous since ancient times for its obvious effects and convenience of practice, having gained special attention from experts and popularity among people.

## **Diet Health Preservation**

Diet health preservation, also called medical dieting, is the precursor of modern diet therapy and nutrition. Its basis is treatment based on categorical identification, and its materials are medicine and food, made use of through special prescription, preparation, and cooking processes. Combining the nature of the medicine and the taste of the food, it turns distasteful medicine into tasty delicacies, incorporating health protection and disease prevention and treatment into the daily diet. There is perhaps no better instantiation of Hippocrates' injunction that "your food should be your medicine and your medicine should be your food". Diet health preservation is a perfect combination of nutrition and treatment. Featuring ease of preparation, reliable effects, and an absence of deleterious side effects, it has been highly praised by health preservation experts throughout the ages.

The elements of diet can be classified several ways. By method of cooking the categories are cakes, curds and whey, syrups, steaming in clear soup, braising, steaming with flour, roasting, frying, and stewing. By composition the categories are blood and flesh grade, grass and tree grade, vegetable grade, glossy ganoderma grade, spice grade, and metal and stone grade. Foods can also be bisected into meat and vegetable dishes, according to the different function and nature of animal and vegetable oils. Diet health preservation stresses prescription based on categorical identification, regulation of yin and yang on the basis of the five solid viscera (heart, liver, spleen, lung, and kidney), and complementary coordination of the five flavors.

## **Medical Health Preservation**

Medical health preservation is a key element in the overall structure of TCHP. The literature on the subject of the use of medicinals for prolonging life and strengthening the body goes back for generations. Shen Nong's *Herbal Classics*, *Dietotherapy Bencao* and *Compendium of Materia Medica* are medical health preservation works of the first class. These books provide details about the health effects of all types of foods and their function in health preservation. In the *Herbal Classics*, medicine is classified according to upper, middle, and lower types. Medicines of the upper type induce relaxation and prolong life. Some of them, such as ginseng and root of membranous milk vetch, also have strengthening effects. Other effects include blood nourishment (rehmannia, Chinese angelica), treatment of yin deficiency (sealwort, glossy privet), and treatment of yang deficiency (saline cistanche, bark of eucommia). Since the action of the five solid viscera is so closely related to yin, yang, qi,

and blood, these medicines also have the effect of strengthening and regulating the functions of the internal organs.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, people are increasingly paying attention to ways to improve the quality and length of their lives. TCM is a healing modality that is very popular, owing to its positive benefits and minimal side effects. However, it is important to recognize that TCM and TCHP are separate modalities and disciplines, so appropriate counsel should be chosen and followed accordingly.

## **Health Preservation According to the Four Seasons**

According to the philosophical precept “the unity of humans and nature”, the order of people and of nature are fundamentally similar. The four seasons and other changes nature undergoes have their reflections in the physiologies and pathologies of human bodies. Those who understand this especially well are the elderly, the feeble, and those suffering from chronic diseases. Such people often have reactions preceding changes in weather conditions, such as arthralgia, dizziness, chest pain, coughing, or exacerbation of their illness. Therefore, any practical health preservation scheme must follow the change of the four seasons. The changing of the seasons calls for adjustments in exercise, diet, daily life, labor, and rest according to the changing of the days. This harmony is necessary for the regulation of yin and yang, fitness, preservation of spirit, avoidance of disease, and prolonging life.

China's earliest classical medical text, *The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic*, is highly recommended for its health preservation advice that follows the four seasons. It elaborates the Law of Four Seasons, which includes observing yin and yang and embodying the birth of Spring, the growth of Summer, the harvest of Autumn, and the storage of Winter in the different aspects of daily life and spirit.

## **Health Preservation in Daily Life**

Good living habits keep people healthy and long-lived, while poor living habits do the opposite, as has been observed since ancient times.

A typical person spends about one third of their lifetime sleeping. Good sleep and sleeping habits play an important role in recovering from fatigue, maintaining vigor, and strengthening the body's immune system. Generally speaking, good sleeping conditions (bedclothes, room temperature and lighting, for example) and good sleeping habits (for example, not sleeping on a full OR an empty stomach, soaking your feet before sleeping, avoiding alcohol, caffeine, and other sleep-interfering substances, making use of sleep rituals, and allowing enough time to sleep) are highly beneficial to overall health.

A healthy diet, suitable clothes, regular daily life, a comfortable living environment,

and good personal hygiene habits are the components of health preservation in daily life. Meeting these criteria may demand rebuilding life patterns, forming new good habits, and setting aside time to exercise.

## **Health Preservation Through Leisure**

The basic principle of health preservation in leisure is to give your interests, hobbies, and creative activities full play. This tends to help regulate your physical and mental condition and elevate mood. Choosing one or, better yet, several endeavors in alignment with your physical and economic condition can enrich life and relieve stress and fatigue.

Some of the many hobbies and interests that people enjoy are music, chess, calligraphy, painting, gardening, keeping pets, and fishing. From a psychological perspective, these types of activities add pleasure and fullness to life.

Consider painting and writing as examples. They both require a calm spirit, correct posture, creativity, and they require you to be comfortable. It is the sense of comfort such activities can bring that can help you refine sentiments, drive off uneasiness, give expression to your deepest feelings, and comfort yourself. Since ancient times, calligraphers have been known for being long-lived. On the one hand, they crystallize spirit in the lofty realm of art. On the other hand, they must concentrate their spirit on the tip of the brush, all the while sitting upright and suspending the wrist while lifting, pressing and pausing in order to achieve the required coordination of physical and mental action. Thus these and other so-called leisurely endeavors can help to foster noble aesthetic sentiment, one of the life-enhancing psychological benefits also conferred by qigong.

Other benefits of keeping leisure in your life include being more open-minded, optimistic, calm, and at ease. Being balanced in such a manner will make it easy to avoid emotional extremes when faced with difficulties, helping to maintain a positive, effective mood, as well as improving overall health and warding off premature senility.

In addition to the above, there are also other methods and practices that can contribute to health preservation, including martial arts and massage.

## ***Health Qigong as a Component of TCHP***

There is already a large body of research on the positive health benefits of every kind of exercise. But besides the body-building functions of conventional types of sports and exercise, health qigong has several special functions. In Chapter 6 we will examine in detail the scientifically documented effects of health qigong, but here we will briefly outline the known benefits.

## **Benefits to Physical Condition**

As a traditional national sport, health qigong is not only distinct from other sports but also from other types of health exercises. Featuring soft movements and a moderate expenditure of energy, it is suitable for people who are feeble, injured, or ill, but besides the movements themselves, health qigong also has another feature, which is the regulation of the breathing that accompanies the movements. These respiratory exercises are highlighted in “Liuzi Jue Health Qigong” (Medical Exercise Based on the Six-Character Formula).

Scientific experiments, medical observations, and the accumulated knowledge of long-time health qigong practitioners all indicate that health qigong has numerous health benefits, including improving the functioning of the digestive, respiratory, cardiovascular, and nervous systems, stimulating appetite, eliminating fatigue, improving sleep quality and blood circulation, enhancing strength and intelligence, and improving working efficiency and endurance.

## **Benefits for Disease Prevention**

Health qigong boosts all of the functions of the human body. The function of disease resistance can be enhanced by specific exercises, but mainly it is achieved by strengthening the overall physique.

Sometimes specific exercises may emphasize certain effects, such as hush, exhale, breathe, pant, blow, and giggle in Liuzi Jue Health Qigong, which correspond respectively to liver, heart, spleen, lung, kidney, and sanjiao (the three portions of the body cavities that house the internal organs and animate their functions). Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong's “putting two hands above the head”, “holding one hand to regulate spleen and stomach”, and “driving off anger by turning head and hip” are further examples. However, these effects are more generally achieved by strengthening the physique to the point where the underlying pathological condition is overcome.

In addition to strengthening disease resistance, health qigong can also have the effect of shortening the treatment period of certain diseases, such as gastric ulcers, by facilitating the effects of the treatment and improving the body's ability to recover. Even more remarkably, health qigong can shorten the treatment periods of many chronic and recurring diseases, freeing up people to spend more time living their lives.

## **Benefits for Resisting Senility and Prolonging Life**

People in ancient times called qigong an art of warding off disease and prolonging life. It was known that if people were ill it would cure them, and if they were not it would strengthen their body.

A broad range of scientific investigations and clinical trials have shown that qigong brings people's conscious will into play in protecting against disease and senility. By the practice of the three regulations (body, breath, and mind) the process of senility can be slowed, which is a very meaningful result for the modern fields of gerontology and geriatrics.

## **Benefits for Regulating Psychology and Cultivating Morals**

Of the three regulations in health qigong, the most important and the most distinctive is mind regulation.

Health qigong adopts the principles of “unity of mind and body” and “unity of mind and qi”. These are expressed through practice by the coordination of movements with breath and with thoughts, implying that mind, body, and qi are one. This type of practice, perhaps combined with suitable music or other gentle stimulation, has been shown to make people happier and more carefree. Long term practice helps to regulate psychology, bringing it into alignment with ideology and morality.

In addition, the mental component of health qigong has the effect of relaxing the cerebral cortex, which contributes to the effectiveness of disease prevention. People who stay in a happy state with high spirits are naturally more resistant to diseases.

The goal of health qigong practitioners, then, is to master the basic skills of health qigong for the purpose of developing and maintaining a strong, healthy body.

## ***“Three Elements” Body-Building Principles of Health Qigong***

- **Regulating Posture:** Posture regulation can be classified with four principles, which are dynamism, tranquility, relaxation, and tenseness. The basic requirements can be summed up as “correct posture and relaxed body”.
- **Achieving Mental Tranquility and Refreshing the Spirit:** The concentration of the attention while maintaining the postures helps to achieve mental tranquility.

- **Regulating Yin and Yang:** Dynamism produces yang, while tranquility produces yin. Likewise, firmness is yang, gentleness is yin. By regulating these principles, as well as related ones like relaxation and tenseness, bending and lifting, stooping or standing, practitioners can balance yin and yang in their bodies.
- **Regulating Qi and Blood:** The “three regulations” all have the effect of regulating the body's various channels and functions. This is apparent to anyone who regularly engages in qigong or bodywork, as there is often a lingering warmth in the body after practice, or even a sensation of a warm current passing through the body. This sensation is referred to as “operation of internal qi”. It is the natural result of developing a keen internal sensitivity. However, it shouldn't be pursued for its own sake, particularly by beginners, as this can lead the mind in the wrong direction during practice.
- **Softening Sinews and Strengthening Bones:** As qi and blood are allowed to flow smoothly in the body, sinews become softer and bones become stronger naturally over time.

Applying the mind to exercise not only exercises the whole body most effectively, it also conserves the body's energy. In one study, sixteen people with hypertension practiced qigong for a year while being monitored by EKG and thermal imaging. Before they began practicing, some of them had heart rates that would increase severely under fast-paced exercise, while others suffered from shortness of breath, chest congestion, and elevated blood pressure. The results of practicing qigong included the lowering of the exercising heart rate, the lowering of blood pressure, and the improvement of breathing ability. These results show that health qigong not only lessens the burden on the heart but also improves the circulation of the blood.

Health qigong, by regulating the relaxation and tension of skeletal muscles and affecting the circulation and therefore distribution of the blood, also helps to regulate the functions of the internal organs. The hearts of those who practice calming exercises spend more time in relaxation and less time in contraction. The oxygen requirement decreases for those who practice sitting or lying meditation, while practicing standing meditation increases basic oxygen consumption. For all practitioners, skin temperature increases, especially for those who practice standing up, and base metabolic rate decreases. These results can be linked with the regular achievement of relaxation and mental tranquility, which regulates the function of the sympathetic nervous system. One type of exercise which achieves these results is called “relaxing reaction treatment”, created by Professor Benson of Harvard. It is a form of calming exercise, distinct from sleeping or sitting meditation. It is effective for confronting certain harmful physiological and psychological reactions, helping to balance the psyche and effectively warding off mental and physical illness.

## ***Health Preservation Through Breath Regulation***

### **Comforting the Mind and Preserving Qi**

Regular practice of breath regulation causes a person's natural breathing to gradually become more gentle and deep, which has the effect of comforting the mind and preserving qi. Abdominal, or complete, respiration is most effective for preserving qi. It has always been known that healthy lungs lead to a long life.

Calming exercises slow the resting breathing rate, strengthen the respiratory range, and smooth out the respiratory exercise curve, all of which contributes to improving overall respiratory efficiency. The manifestations of this improvement are increases in qi and tidal volume. In one study researchers observed 21 practitioners whose ventilatory capacity decreased during practice sessions, while their tidal volume increased. In addition, blood oxygen saturation among the participants decreased during the exercise sessions and remained lowered for ten to twenty minutes afterwards. These results indicate that although the lowered respiration decreases the blood's oxygen level, the coincident state of mental tranquility lowers the metabolism and reduces the body's oxygen consumption proportionally. Simultaneously, the hematopoiesis mechanism of bone marrow is stimulated, gradually increasing the number of erythrocytes, allowing the body to tolerate a lower oxygen environment.

## **Regulating Yin, Yang, Qi, and Blood**

Inhaling corresponds to yang, while exhaling corresponds to yin. Regulating the respiration therefore serves to regulate yin and yang within the body. For example, holding the breath can serve to preserve vigor and clear colds, and exhaling the turbid principle serves to reduce fever. Modern medical research has also found that regulating the breath can strengthen the function of the heart, lungs, stomach, and intestines, improve the circulation of blood among the internal organs, regulate the autonomic nervous system, regulate the body's oxygen and carbon dioxide levels, improve metabolism, and conserve the body's energy.

In the early 1980s, a newspaper in the former Soviet Union, the "Labor", published an article entitled "Deep Breathing Harms Health". The reason for these results being written and published was a set of experiments which revealed the possibility of creating an imbalance of oxygen and carbon dioxide in the blood due to what might be called "over-breathing". The sharp decrease in carbon dioxide levels in the blood caused by taking in too much oxygen can cause spasmodic diseases, such as bronchial asthma, angina pectoris, vessel nervous cephalalgia, and gastroenteropathy, to surface. Certain organs, such as the cerebrum, heart, and kidneys, require a balance of 7% carbon dioxide and 2% oxygen in the blood. However, the air we breathe contains less than 1% carbon dioxide and over 20% oxygen. Therefore, the researchers proposed that after inhaling people should hold the breath for as long as possible, with a maximum ability of under a minute indicating a reduced adoptive capacity. This practice is reminiscent of breath regulation in qigong. Regulated breathing balances the body better than simply inhaling and exhaling fully in rapid succession, or hyperventilating.

Modern physiology indicates that the activities of the internal organs, which are not controlled by conscious awareness, are regulated by the autonomic nervous system. The excitation of the sympathetic nervous system, such as an increase in blood pressure or an

increase in the rate of respiration or metabolism, is what TCM calls an “excess of yang”. The excitation of the parasympathetic nervous system, such as a decrease in blood pressure, the slowing of respiration, an increase in saliva secretion, or an increase in intestinal function, is called an “excess of yin” in TCM. The former states consume energy, while the latter states conserve energy. The sympathetic nervous system is associated with inhalation, and the parasympathetic with exhalation. As early as the 1950s, research into the physiological effects of qigong already indicated the ability of breath regulation to regulate the function of the autonomic nervous system.

## ***Health Preservation Through Mind Regulation***

### **Regulating the Balance of Yin and Yang**

Mind regulation is the central activity of health qigong, with the basic aim being achieving mental tranquility. In a sense, the mind is the most important part of the body, and it needs to be conditioned and protected from the rigors of the outside world in order for a person to be vigorous and healthy. A state of mental tranquility allows the body systems to regulate themselves without interference. As a result of health qigong practice, the body consumes as little of its own resources as necessary to maintain the yin essence.

Modern research shows that as skin temperature rises, so do skin potential and microcirculation. It also shows that when the attention is focused on the head, blood pressure increases, while when it is focused on the feet blood pressure decreases. Research in America has shown that when a person who is trained in relaxation exercises visualizes the action of inflating a bicycle tire, the action potential of the biceps will mimic the physical action. These results indicate that the state of mental tranquility can actively regulate blood distribution, mobilize organ function, and balance the body's systems, further supporting the idea that mind regulation exercises can regulate the balance of yin and yang in the body, thus regulating the movement of qi and blood and regulating the functions of the organs. This, coupled with the result that mind regulation can indirectly govern the activities of the organs through the action of the autonomic nervous system by means of techniques like achieving mental tranquility, reflective attention, and psychological suggestions, indicates that we are quite capable of self-regulating many physiological functions that are often considered to be out of our control. Generally speaking, moving thoughts have yang quality and still thoughts have yin quality. Preserving the outer (yang) qualities has the ability to anneal, while preserving the inner (yin) qualities has the ability to nourish with warmth. For example, the habitual ideas of people with high blood pressure are associated with the acupuncture point Yungch'uan (Jing-well Point, K1), and the habitual ideas of people with low blood pressure are associated with the acupuncture point gv 20. People of yang deficiency hold thoughts of heat and warmth and take on the quality of the sun, while people of yin deficiency hold thoughts of coolness and take on the quality of the moon.

Mind regulation practice and the achievement of mental tranquility have effects that are measurable by an EEG. The resting EEG pattern of people who have been practicing

qigong for ten years or more is noticeably different from non-practitioners. In addition, research in experimental psychology indicates that qigong and mind regulation exercises can improve cognitive functions such as feeling, perception, and memory. Other qualities that are measurably improved are the flexibility and speed of movements, thought agility, attention, observation, memory, self-control, emotional stability, and willpower. The longer a person practices qigong, the greater these effects become.

## ***Building Healthy Habits***

Building healthy habits involves regulating the mind to control the actions to create a healthy lifestyle. Tranquility is the source of wisdom, which can lead to sudden breakthroughs, both internal and external. The consequent improvement in cognitive ability makes controlling behavior become even easier. In the terms of health qigong, this dynamic is summarized as a balance of psychology, diet, relaxation, and tranquility. It has long been the opinion of our ancestors that people who can coordinate the balance of these elements tend to live long and healthy lives, and these same principles have been put into practice by the WHO in the form of its “Victoria Declaration”, which describes the “FUN” lifestyle:

F – Frequent exercise: five minutes' preparation time, twenty minutes exercise time, five minutes settling time, reaching the target heart rate, three to five times per week.

U – Unison and harmony: a harmonious and intimate family atmosphere, open communication and understanding with relatives and friends.

N – Nutrition: a balanced diet with a wide variety of vegetables.

## Chapter 4 Introduction to Four Set Health Qigong

### ***Four Sets of Health Qigong***

The Chinese Health Qigong Association has organized traditional Health Qigong into four main sets, called “Yi-Gin-Ching”, “The Five Birds Show” (Wuqin Xi), “The Sixth Tactic” (Liuqi Jue), and “Ba Duan Jin” (Eight Sectioned Exercise), shortened as “Yi, Five, Six, and Eight”, or even more simply “1568”. In this section we will introduce these four sets.

### **Yi-Gin-Ching Health Qigong**

“Yi” means change, “Gin” means the tissues of the body or the body itself, while “Ching” simply means classics. The *Yi-Gin-Ching* is thus a classic text on the way of using exercise to soften, stretch, and strengthen muscles, tendons, and bones. The skills it teaches are widely varied, and there are many beautiful legends about its origin. One such legend says that it was created by Bodhidharma, who transmitted Buddhism from India to China. The legend says that he observed that monks and priests had obstructed blood flow from sitting quietly for long periods of time without exercising. Therefore, he developed exercises to not only enhance blood circulation but also soften tendons, exercise bones, and strengthen the body. Some scholars, on the other hand, hold that the *Yi-Gin-Ching* was created by a preacher in Tiantai Mountain during the years of Tiaqi in the Ming dynasty. However, what is well established is that the popular “12 Postures of Yi-Gin-Ching” was first found in *Neigong Tushuo*, which was recorded by Pan Wei in the eighth year of Xian Feng during the Qing dynasty.

Yi-Gin-Ching Health Qigong inherits the quintessence of the 12 postures of the *Yi-Gin-Ching*. It is arranged according to the model shared among qigong, TCM, and related modern theories of health and fitness. It is both scientifically rigorous and popular, and powerfully unifies form and spirit, rustic and modern. The movements included are the first, second, and third postures of Weituo, presenting pestle, reaching for the stars, pulling back the tail of an ox, spreading wings, pulling sabers, falling to the floor, blue dragon spreading paws, tiger swoops down for food, and bowing and falling off tails. These movements are coherent and organic, and incorporate the principles of unfolding movements, the spinning and bending of the spinal column, the stretching of tendons, continuous symmetry, the coupling of hardness with softness, and aesthetic sentiment. In these exercises the breath is natural and links movement and silence; the body guides the qi and the mind follows the body.

## **Five Birds Show Health Qigong**

Five Birds Show Qigong was created by the famous doctor Hua Tuo during the Eastern Dynasty. It is inspired by the movements of tigers, deer, bears, apes, and birds. It provides instructions for breathing that incorporate the qigong and TCM principles, including gasification, the meridians, and the state of the viscera.

Hua Tuo's recording of the Five Birds Show was first found in *The History of Three Kingdoms-Biography of Hua Lun*, written by Chen Shou during the Xi Jin period. Then, during the Ming and Qing dynasties, Five Birds Show Qigong was described in pictures and words in the *Chi Fengsui* and Cao Wuji's *Wanshou*. By this time, Five Birds Show Qigong had developed a diversity of schools, each with unique styles and features.

Five Birds Show Health Qigong, also called Wuqin Xi Health Qigong, incorporates five shows, corresponding to tigers, deer, bears, apes, and birds. Each show consists of two movements, so the whole show includes ten movements. It also incorporates breath regulation and Yin Qi Guivuan, which embodies the combination of entity, qi, and spirit. Altogether, it embodies design, physique, and aesthetics with ancient knowledge and modern exercise science. It is based on the TCM theories of bowels and meridians. The five shows each have an individual, as well as a synergistic, fitness effect: the majestic movement of the tiger, the quiet and stillness of the deer, the steady state of the bear, the smartness of the ape, and the agility of the bird combine to unify entity, qi, and spirit, inside and out. The show is easy to learn, symmetrical, balanced, reliable, and safe, as it is very easy to regulate the range and intensity of exercise. And, as with any set, the more familiar one becomes with the movements the more detailed the practice of the three regulations becomes.

## **Sixth Tactic Health Qigong**

The Sixth Tactic, or Sixth Qi Tactic, is a method of strengthening organs, warding off disease, and lengthening life that involves using breathing and recitation of the syllables “xū, hē, hū, sī, chuī, xī” to regulate the function of the liver, heart, spleen, lungs, kidney, and Sanjiao.

Techniques for getting rid of disease by breathing and making sounds have a long history, being recorded in such classics as the *Classic of the Virtue of the Tao* and the *Subsistence Cultivation Record* of the North and South dynasties, which includes a complete explanation of the Sixth Tactic. In fact, every period has writings on the Sixth Tactic, so it has been widely used as a method of curing disease and staying fit, and many therapists and fitness experts have contributed to its methods, theories, and practices.

Sixth Tactic Health Qigong, also called Liuzi Jue Health Qigong, consists primarily of breath regulation and sounds, supplemented by simple movements. The movements are easy to learn, soft and slow, and include both static and dynamic states. The precise enunciation of the sounds and action of the voice mechanism has been studied in detail and

systematized. Sixth Tactic Health Qigong can be an independent practice in its own right, but it complements the action of other forms of healing exercises that strengthen viscera and bones. The movements, being comfortable, soft, and slow, like clouds and water, emphasize the qigong qualities and complement the sounds in each of nine tactics which stress the principles of “body guides qi” and “mind follows qi”.

## **Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong**

“Ba Duan” refers to duan, jie, and 8 movements, and signifies that this form of qigong is composed of many intricate components, while “jin” refers both to gold and silk and means something like “sumptuous”. In another sense “jin” can be interpreted as a unified collection of instructions on a subject.

The name “Ba Duan Jin” was first found written in the *Yi Jian Zhi*, created by Hong Mai during the Southern Song period, in the following passage: “Li Siju, the imperial diarist..., would stand up at midnight, breathing deliberately and massaging himself. He was practicing what is called ‘Ba Duan Jin’”. Then at the end of the Qing dynasty the *Xin Chu Baoxin Tu Shuo-Ba Duan Jin* was published, containing pictures depicting a complete set of movements. While the exact origin of Ba Duan Jin is uncertain, it is known to be related to the *Derivation Graph*, originating in Ma-wangdui, Changsha, Hunan Province, and to the *Subsistence Cultivation Record*, written by Tao Hongjing during the North and South dynasties, where we can find pictures of related movements, showing that Ba Duan Jin has a rich cultural history.

Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong is an aerobic set of exercises, designed in accordance with scientific principles of kinematics and physiology. Its postures and movements include holding the hands high with palms up, posing as an archer on both sides, holding one arm aloft, looking backwards, swinging the head and lowering the body, moving the hands down the back and legs, touching the feet, thrusting the fists, making the eyes glare, and raising and lowering the heels. It also includes specific postures for beginning and ending. The benefits of these exercises are various, including regulating the internal organs, preventing sickness and strain, relieving stress, enhancing strength, and curing diseases. The practice should be soft, slow, relaxed, and comfortable, combining looseness and tension, dynamic and static phases. The body should move by following the mind, exercising both. Each movement is agile and coherent and is characterized by symmetry and harmony. Altogether the set embodies the concepts of the coupling of blankness with fullness and hardness with softness.

## **Principles Guiding the Creation of Four Set Health Qigong**

Four Set Health Qigong was the first meaningful attempt by experts to create a systematic form of qigong. Its success is attributable to a blend of concepts, both old and new. Here we introduce some of the principles that went into the creation of Four Set

Health Qigong.

## **Principles of Strengthening the Body and Preserving Health**

Among the rich cultural inheritance left by our ancestors, including a long-standing history and a vast geographical expanse, is a qigong practice refined by billions of people over thousands of years, which contributes to its richness as well as its diversity. Over time there have been many schools, many interests, and many value orientations applied to the development of qigong. Some have approached it from the perspective of keeping fit, some from the perspective of curing disease, some from the perspective of defending against enemies, some from the perspective of improving skills and performances, and some from the perspective of pursuing immortality.

In recent decades, particularly the 1980s, the popularization of qigong led to a profusion of styles, which often lead to confusion for beginners, but all of which contributed to the development of qigong. However, not everything that was contributed was of high quality, and some of it was downright ignorant and superstitious. This is an example of why skepticism and scientific rigor are necessary in interpreting differing schools of thought.

The term health qigong itself mainly refers to any qigong activity that has the potential to strengthen the body and keep people fit. The concept of immortality, stemming from Taoist alchemy and traditionally associated with qigong, has historically been surrounded by ignorance and superstition, not to mention elitism. Therefore, “strengthening the body and developing fitness” is the slogan of modern, scientific qigong. Such a value orientation is not only practical, it also guides the development of qigong in a positive manner.

Yi-Gin-Ching, the Five Birds Show, the Sixth Tactic, and Ba Duan Jin are excellent representatives of the wealth of qigong history. They focus on using the mind to regulate the body and the breathing, have obvious positive health effects, and are safe for anybody to practice, making them quite suitable for systematization and popularization.

What is more, both strict scientific experimentation and the experience of countless practitioners have shown the effectiveness of Four Set Health Qigong in strengthening the body and improving fitness. The movements are easy to learn and memorize, having no complicated configurations or difficult, taxing movements, and the duration and intensity of practice are easy to regulate. At the same time they are complete and embody all of the challenges inherent to qigong, taking a short time to learn but a lifetime to master, allowing practitioners to progress and improve as long as they live.

## **Using Science as a Yardstick in the Creation of Four Set Health Qigong**

A wide variety of qigong styles has been around for a long time, consisting of different features and movements, but in general they all have the same aims of exercising the bones, facilitating the circulation of the blood, preventing and curing disease, and prolonging the life span. However, certain exaggerations, such as achieving immortality, are abundant in the literature and language of qigong. This is why Four Set Health Qigong was developed in accordance with scientific methodology, to allow it to accurately discern and absorb the relevant wisdom of traditional qigong.

Thus the first principle of the creation of Four Set Health Qigong is the scientific method. The group responsible for this body of research is the Chinese Health Qigong Association, formerly the Health Qigong Management Center under the China State Sport General Administration. The bulk of the research itself was awarded, after a bidding process, to Beijing Sport University, Shanghai Sport University, Wuhan Sport Institute, Xivuan Institute of China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Beijing University of Chinese Medicine, and the Capital College of Physical Education, resulting in the formation of four subgroups which bore the task of crystallizing and solidifying the traditional teachings of qigong.

The scientific method is integral to the development and practice of Four Set Health Qigong, which is why it is also referred to as a “scientific exercise”.

## **Chapter 5 Features of Four Set Health Qigong**

### ***Four Set Health Qigong Qualifies as Aerobic Exercise***

Western philosophers have said, “Sunshine, air, water, and exercise are the sources of life and health.” Another common saying is “Life lies in exercise.” However, there are many types of exercise, with a variety of intensities, effects, and manifestations. But which ones are the most beneficial to health? This was the question on the mind of Doctor Cooper, an American medical doctor who created and popularized the now famous “aerobic exercise method”.

“Aerobic” means “with oxygen”, so aerobic exercise simply means endurance exercise that can facilitate the circulation of blood and air within the body by stimulating the heart and lungs. The most popular types of aerobic exercise are things like walking, jogging, swimming, jumping rope, and bicycling. Although anaerobic (“without oxygen”) forms of exercise, such as static training, weightlifting, and sprinting can strengthen the muscles' explosive power, they do not provide the fitness benefits of improved circulatory function.

Aerobic exercise has three traits, which are intensity, duration, and frequency. The best results are achieved by exercising at an intensity great enough to sustain an elevated heart rate for a half hour or more per session, at least three times per week. The standard target heart rate for aerobic exercise is given by the formula 220 minus age, times 60% to 80%, with 60% being moderate and 80% being the maximum safe heart rate for the person. Research shows that a moderate target heart rate (i.e. 60%) is both effective and safe for most people who do not suffer from cardiovascular disease symptoms. Needless to say, it wouldn't do for anybody, particularly those who do suffer from symptoms of cardiovascular disease, to simply blindly attempt to achieve a particular heart rate without listening to the advice of medical professionals and the signals of their own body.

Four Set Health Qigong has the characteristics of aerobic exercise. As an example, consider the Five Birds Show. During the research to create Four Set Health Qigong, 60 people between the ages of 50 and 69 with no serious or chronic illnesses were organized to practice Qigong three to four times per week for at least 45 minutes each time. After three months of practice, the results were that males were able to achieve their target heart rates in an average of ten and a half minutes, while females were able to achieve them slightly faster, in an average of nine minutes. At the end of practice, the heart rate would gradually return to normal. Thus, for most of the duration of the exercise, the participants were at their target heart rates, meeting the requirements of low and medium intensity aerobic exercise for people in this age range.

The research also revealed that after these people had been practicing the Five Birds Show for six months, their resting heart rate had decreased, indicating a strong heart; a strong heart achieves more with each pulse, so is able to pulse more slowly. Furthermore, their resting breathing pattern had changed noticeably, being deeper, quieter, and more smooth and relaxed, indicating improved respiratory function. Further results recorded were increased warmth in the body and limbs, indicating improved circulatory function, and

improved strength and flexibility in the joints, indicating that the participants received all of the benefits associated with traditional aerobic exercise.

## ***Four Set Health Qigong Develops Body and Mind Together***

The goal of social development is to improve people's lives. However, in the midst of modern development lurks a serious health crisis, composed of life threatening illnesses such as AIDS and cancer on the one hand and obesity, depression, and various other mental and psychosomatic disorders resulting from a toxic and fiercely competitive social environment on the other. These illnesses of the modern world, unknown in ancient times, are collectively referred to as “diseases of civilization”.

Four Set Health Qigong has an important role to play in the cure and, more importantly, the prevention, of diseases of civilization. On the basis of traditional Chinese philosophy, Four Set Health Qigong emphasizes the integral nature of the whole individual, including thoughts, behaviors, society, environment, and nature. Therefore, the focus of Four Set Health Qigong expands beyond the physiological functions of conventional exercise (which tend to focus on rapid development in the short term), emphasizing soft and slow movements coupled with regulated breathing and an attentive mind.

For example, Yi-Gin-Ching Health Qigong focuses on body regulation and breath regulation, but it implicitly requires mind regulation in order to accomplish these, while some movements explicitly call for a particular way of focusing the attention. For example, the third posture in Weituo Xianchu requires attention to the hands, while the posture “reaching for stars” requires attention to the life gate. Other postures specify certain imagery: Sanpan Falling Down calls for the hands to be weighted down, while postures like Pulling Cow's Tail are meant to be envisioned as well as performed.

Four Set Health Qigong incorporates the principle of “Naturalization of Relaxation and Calm”. This principle applies to the mind as well as the body. Habits of thinking should be gradually adapted to be suitable to the needs of the moment, diminishing distracting thoughts, nervousness, and gloomy emotions, allowing the nervous system to relax and regulate itself. Such practice is helpful for getting rid of worry and releasing inner conflicts, helping us to relieve the imbalanced psychological state associated with modern society and strengthen our hearts.

In addition to individual benefits, the research that went into producing Four Set Health Qigong also revealed benefits that emerge when groups of people practice together, such as promoting friendship and strengthening communication. At the same time that it improves the body of the individual, it facilitates the development of relationships, helping to alleviate the loneliness and anxiety that many people experience.

## ***Four Set Health Qigong is Safe and Reliable***

Four Set Health Qigong is a sport, but it is significantly different than Western sports. Although Western sports strengthen the body, they do so by aiming for goals such as “higher, faster, and stronger”. Through competition they showcase the health and strength of the bodies of those who run the fastest, jump the highest, and perform the most skillful and complicated movements.

Four Set Health Qigong, by contrast, is a solo form of exercise that involves not only regulating body movements but also breathing and psychological focus. Implicitly, it does not advocate competition or pursuit of extreme limits, but rather promotes harmony among the parts of the individual and the environment through self-exercise, with the sole intention of strengthening the body and preserving health. Because of this holistic focus, Four Set Health Qigong meets the needs of sustaining a healthy society, both now and in the future, which has helped it to draw widespread attention and active participation.

Compared to conventional types of sports, the movements of Four Set Health Qigong are not difficult, the speed and rhythm are slow, and the demands on the body are light, minimizing the chances of injury during practice. And while Four Set Health Qigong involves all three regulations (body, breath, and mind), different sets pay more attention to certain areas than to others, and the whole system is scientifically designed to be maximally effective with minimal risk.

Both research and the opinions of its practitioners indicate that Four Set Health Qigong is safe, effective, and reliable for maintaining an optimal state of well being.

## ***Four Set Health Qigong is Easy to Practice***

Each set of Four Set Health Qigong contains simple routines with easy-to-learn essentials. Each set requires about fifteen minutes to practice and can be learned in detail from CD-ROMs and textbooks, allowing people to study on their own, self-regulating the intensity and duration of practice. The sets can be practiced in conjunction or individually. Certain short sets of movements can even be practiced on their own repeatedly. The practice can be done silently or with musical accompaniment. It does not need to be limited or constrained in any way, making it suitable for male and female, young and old.

Generally speaking, most types of conventional sports require funds to be invested in the form of equipment or gymnasium space. This can form a barrier that keeps many people from exercising. This is not so for Four Set Health Qigong however, as it can be practiced anywhere and by anybody, with no equipment necessary.

“High efficiency, fast tempo” is the theme of modern work and life. While many conventional sports have time requirements to participate, the time requirements for practicing Four Set Health Qigong are very flexible. It can easily fit into and around breaks,

leisure time, idle time, and first thing in the morning before getting up or last thing in the evening before going to bed. Practice is not dependent upon weather or seasonal conditions and can be determined completely by personal factors such as strength, time, and interest.

## ***Four Set Health Qigong Inherits the Best of Tradition and Modern Times***

While qigong has been a component of traditional Chinese culture for thousands of years, among the many teachings on the subject are some which are valuable for fostering health and some which preach ignorance and superstition. However, if we were to deny completely the validity of these teachings, we would not be good materialists. The worthwhile challenge lies in absorbing the essence and discarding the dross. This intention, along with strengthening the management of the system, were intrinsic to the creation of Four Set Health Qigong.

## **Four Set Health Qigong Draws upon the Quintessence of Tradition**

During the process of creating Four Set Health Qigong, the four subgroups researched many related documents and searched millions of words of literature. As examples; the Ba Duan Jin group collected 64 distinct editions of the Ba Duan Jin ranging in date from the Southern Song dynasty to the present date, and the Sixth Tactic group carried on topical research for modern documents with the help of the Periodical Database on Medical Health and Sports at the National Library Board, the Tsinghua University Library, and the Peking University Library.

To further incorporate the essence of traditional qigong, some research subgroups held observation seminars on traditional qigong, discussed widely with delegates from different qigong schools, and consulted with around 200 experts who had done related research. Others went to the birthplace of qigong to find clues about its origin and accurately frame its creation. For example, the Five Bird Show Group went to Bo Zhou City in Anhui province and carried out fieldwork in the hometown of its founder, the famous doctor Hua Tuo of the Eastern Han Dynasty.

On the basis of this compilation of research from literature, surveys, experiments, as well as thorough correspondence with experts from the many different schools, the research subgroups composed the basic movements of Four Set Health Qigong and compiled a summary on qigong theory. The Yi-Gin-Ching was transmitted mostly intact, preserving the 12 essential postures and using the same names as the original. The Five Bird Show is taken directly from the *History of the Three Kingdoms, Biography of Hua Tuo*, where the order of the movements is recorded as: tigers, deer, bears, apes, and birds, and improved upon the basis

of the *Subsistence Cultivation Record* and the *Illustrated Explanation of the Five Birds Show*.

## **Four Set Health Qigong Meets the Needs of Modern Times**

Four Set Health Qigong both inherits the best of tradition and fully embodies the spirit of modern times. The theory of Four Set Health Qigong not only coincides with the traditional theories of qigong and TCM, but also with modern scientific methods and knowledge. It promotes traditional culture and values as well as modern scientific thought.

Although the movements of Four Set Health Qigong come from traditional health exercises, they are characteristic of many other types of exercise. For example, in Yi-Gin-Ching the movements are very soft, yet the process of paying attention to how the revolving and bending of the spine drives the movement of the limbs and torso precipitates an awareness of the harmony between limbs and body, resulting in harmonious movements that embody comfort, coherence, and beauty by artfully combining the dynamic and static phases of the human body under the guidance of a spiritual intention. Furthermore, Four Set Health Qigong meets the requirements of high efficiency inherent in modern lifestyles due to its being very easy to learn and readily adaptable to a wide range of people.

## **Four Set Health Qigong Incorporates Collective Wisdom to Withstand the Test of History**

The creation of Four Set Health Qigong was a systematic project. If it were created by only one person, or even one field of experts, it would be too narrow in scope to meet its goals. Four Set Health Qigong was created with input from experts not only in TCM and qigong but also in related subjects. In order to design a systematization of Qigong that would withstand the test of history, it was necessary to incorporate the input of diverse experts and scholars.

Some of the subjects in which experts were either consulted or included as part of the research team were martial arts, philosophy, religion, culture, art, psychology, and biochemistry. Each one joined the research team for the purposes of preserving traditional Chinese culture and contributing their specialized expertise to the development of Four Set Health Qigong.

The research took place in an atmosphere of open academic collaboration and innovation, and the results were successively revised through an open feedback loop between researchers, experts, and participants.

In order to further increase the quality of the finished product, a public bidding was held to assign the production of the official audio-visual and musical accompaniment and

practice clothing of Four Set Health Qigong. The Beijing Science and Education Film Studio and China Central Television were responsible for producing instructional multimedia accompaniment, while the Central Conservatory of Music was responsible for composing the musical accompaniment, and the Institute of Arts and Crafts of Tsinghua University was responsible for designing the practice clothing.

Thus we can safely say that through the mutual effort of experts and scholars from all circles of society and the application of collective wisdom, Four Set Health Qigong contains the essence of modern qigong. It is not only recognized and appreciated by experts and scholars, but also widely popular.

## **Chapter 6 Physiological Effects of Health Qigong**

In recent years, much research has been carried out on the physiological effects of health qigong. This research has included measurements of both simple and comprehensive physiological indices, including biochemical and immune indices. All of this has added up to a comprehensive picture of the physiological effects of health qigong.

Four Set Health Qigong initiated the era of scientific qigong development. During the process of its creation, four research subgroups carried on short term classes for 6 months all over China. For example, the research group dedicated to Ba Duan Jin carried on practice in nine different health qigong stations located in Harbin, Hei Long Jiang province in which 200 persons between the ages of 45 and 70 participated, with favorable and beneficial results for their health.

Once the new system of qigong had been established, it was approved by the Science and Education Division of the China State Sport General Administration and a report entitled "Research on the Fitness Effects of Four Set Health Qigong" was published jointly by Shanghai Sport University, Health Qigong Management Center of Jiang Xi province, Jiang Xi College of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Xiyuan Institute of China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine, Beijing Sport University, Anhui College of Traditional Chinese Medicine and the Science Research Institute of China State Sport General Administration. It summarized the details of the research, which took place in seven provinces and involved 5,322 participants. The participants were separated into experimental and control groups and detailed data was recorded regarding their conditions at the beginning of the study and at three month and six month intervals. The data that was recorded included over 20 variables related to physiological and psychological state, including in some cases biochemical and EEG analysis. The results of the research scientifically demonstrate the effectiveness and applicability of Four Set Health Qigong and its suitability for popularization.

### ***General Effects of Health Qigong***

Qigong has long been known for its effects of strengthening the body and boosting the function of all its systems. In this section we will look at some of the ways that these effects have been documented scientifically.

### **Effects on the Nervous System**

The regulation of metabolism is mainly accomplished by a combination of nerves and biochemicals, which serve to regulate all of the functions of the body.

One of the effects of practicing mental regulation through health qigong is that the cells of the cerebral cortex, which processes high-level thought, are able to rest. This allows them to function optimally, which maintains the optimal functioning of the brain and the whole organism. Another effect is that the muscular relaxation decreases the activity of the sympathetic nervous system, which helps to balance and improve mood.

When people are practicing qigong, brain activity increases in the frontal lobe as shown on an EEG. This increased activity in the frontal lobe creates a chain reaction which causes the brain to secrete enkephalins, neurotransmitters which are associated with feelings of happiness and relaxation. This facilitates the body's ability to maintain homeostasis and heal itself. Therefore, regular qigong practice can enhance nerve function, which indirectly regulates the activities of the internal organs and promotes overall healing and prevention of disease.

## **Effects on the Endocrine System**

The actions of nerve activity and glandular secretions are closely linked in the body, almost to the point of being inseparable. The pivot point of both systems is the hypothalamus, which is not only a nerve center but also an endocrine gland. The hypothalamus responds to brain activity (ideas) and releases stimulating or inhibiting hormones into the bloodstream.

In a state of mental tranquility, the hypothalamus balances the psychological and physiological state and preserves the body's healthy homeostasis. The endocrine system relies on the blood to transmit its chemical messengers, hormones, throughout the body. Hormones are important substances within the body, and play significant roles in the processes of growth, puberty, maturation, and senility.

As an example of this type of effect, the rate of occurrence of atherosclerosis among women rises after menopause, which is associated with a rise in the probability of coronary disease occurrence. Estrogen is also closely related to bone metabolism, and the loss of estrogenic hormones is associated with a loss of bone density after menopause. For men, the change of sexual hormone levels also plays a role in the senility process. Testosterone (T) is the most important sexual hormone in men's bodies. Besides its role in secondary sexual organs and characteristics, it also plays roles in the metabolism of protein synthesis, osteogenesis, and calcium metabolism.

Long-term practice of health qigong incrementally stimulates and strengthens the endocrine system. Research observing practitioners of Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong (Eight-sectioned exercise) recorded that three months of exercising was enough to increase the content of estradiol (E<sub>2</sub>) in women's bodies, and six months of exercising was enough to increase the content of testosterone in men's bodies. Likewise, six months of practicing Liuzi Jue Health Qigong was enough to increase the content of estradiol and beta-endorphin (β-EP) in practitioner's bodies' as well as testosterone and growth hormone.

## **Effects on the Cardiovascular System**

According to modern medical theory, the circulation of the blood is mainly regulated by the nervous system. Therefore, the practice of the three regulations, which guide the mind into a state of tranquility, helps to regulate the heart rate and output volume and blood pressure by regulating the autonomic nervous system, particularly by reducing the excitation of the sympathetic nervous system. In addition, health qigong is effective in improving the circulation of blood throughout the body. Therefore, health qigong is beneficial for curing and preventing diseases of the heart and blood vessels.

## **Effects on the Digestive System**

In a state of mental tranquility, the relative excitation of the sympathetic nervous system decreases while that of the vagus nerve increases. Since the digestive system is regulated mainly by the vagus nerve, one effect of health qigong is to accelerate gastrointestinal peristalsis and reduce the stomach emptying time. In addition, the digestive enzyme secretions increase and the appetite is stimulated, both of which contribute to improving the digestive and absorptive function of the human body.

In addition to these effects, the intensification of abdominal respiration and the expansion of the range of movement of the abdomen, coupled with the peritoneal pressure change and the massage of the internal organs, can effectively stimulate the circulation of blood to the internal organs, helping to regulate the functioning of the stomach and intestines. Therefore, long-term health qigong practice provides multiple benefits to the digestive, absorptive, and excretory functions of the body.

## **Effects on the Hemopoietic System**

The main elements of blood are erythrocytes, corpuscles, and platelets, each of which has a specialized physiological function. Erythrocytes consist mainly of hemoglobin, which functions to transport oxygen and carbon dioxide. Corpuscles are important components of the immune system that resist and destroy intruding pathogenic microorganisms by producing antibodies to mark them and then by swallowing them. The functions of the platelets are to induce the coagulation of blood to arrest bleeding and to preserve the integrity of the capillary walls.

Experiments involving observation of blood state and vasopermeability have shown that both erythrocyte quantity and hemoglobin levels increase during health qigong practice, indicating that the practice strengthens hemopoietic function. They also show that three

months of practicing Wuqin Xi Health Qigong is enough to increase measurably the hemoglobin levels of all participants, indicating an improvement of the oxygen-carrying capacity of the blood. Six months of practice showed a decrease in the total number of corpuscles and platelets, at least for females, indicating a decrease in immune stress and improved blood viscosity.

## **Effects on the Immune System**

The immune system is the body's defense system. Immunity is a physiological function of self-recognition and non-self exclusion. Immune function is a representative index of the health and physical condition of the human body. Through suitable exercises, immune system function can be improved and disease resistance strengthened.

The T lymphocyte is the most numerous and most important type of immune cell, due to its flexibility. The ratio of CD4<sup>+</sup> and CD8<sup>+</sup> cells in the organism reflects the state of balance of the immune system. A disproportionate ratio will lead to an abnormality in immune function. Therefore, only when the ratio of these two types of cells is in a suitable range can the immune system respond adequately to invaders without damaging the body itself. The NK cell is an important component of congenital immunity which plays an extensive role in the body's defenses, particularly in defending against tumors. Observations of practitioners of Wuqin Xi Health Qigong showed improvement in the ratio of CD4<sup>+</sup> and CD8<sup>+</sup> cells as well as in the activity of NK cells, clearly indicating a beneficial long-term effect of health qigong practice for immune function.

## ***Specific Benefits***

Besides strengthening the body overall, health qigong also has specific benefits in terms of improving health and reversing or preventing disease. In this section we will review some of the specific benefits that have been scientifically recorded.

## **Regulating Heart Rate and Blood Pressure**

The breath regulation component of qigong requires deep, long breaths, and in particular the exhale is much longer than usual. This provides the effect of lowering the excitability of the vagus nerve and slowing the heart rate. Research pertaining to Wuqin Xi Health Qigong recorded that six months of practice lowered the resting heart rates of practitioners, as well as lowering the heart rate during each session. The practitioners of Ba

Duan Jin Health Qigong likewise displayed a lowered resting heart rate after six months of practicing.

Mind regulation keeps the cerebrum in a tranquil state, minimizing interference from within and without. This results in an increased adaptability of the heart to physical activity. For example, it lowers the tension in the small vessels and coronary arteries and increases the flexibility of the artery pipe shell, lowering blood pressure. Observations of practitioners of both Ba Duan Jin and Liuzi Jue Health Qigong revealed reduced systolic and diastolic blood pressures. These results indicate that health qigong can be effective for improving the health of the heart and blood vessels.

## **Improving Blood Supply to the Heart**

The slow, smooth, and continuous dynamic muscular movements of health qigong can increase returned blood volume to the heart as well as strengthen the myocardial contraction, and long-term practice can improve the heart's capacity to pump blood. Research pertaining to Yi-Gin Ching Health Qigong shows that long term practice can strengthen the conformation of the myocardium and diastole and the contraction of the ventricle. Exercise tolerance tests at three months and six months revealed that the practitioner's heart rates declined more quickly upon finishing using an exercise bike after three months of practice, and even more rapidly after six months of practice. This further demonstrates the beneficial effects of health qigong for the nervous system. Because of the central role that the nervous system has in the regulation of all of the body's functions, a well-functioning nervous system creates a healthy heart and body.

## **Improving Lung Capacity**

The practice of breath regulation invokes a complex physiological reflexive mechanism. On the one hand, breath regulation deepens the tranquility of the cerebral state, while on the other hand it strengthens the oxygen changing mechanism of the pulmonary alveolus. At the same time, it massages the internal organs, improving their function, improves the circulation of the blood, and decreases the excitability of the respiratory center, helping to regulate the autonomic nervous system.

Breath regulation requires the practitioner's breath to be deep, long, even, and gentle. This strengthens the power of the expiratory muscles, which improves the individual's lung capacity by reducing the relative proportion of anatomical dead space, improving the gas interchange efficiency between the pulmonary alveolus and capillary blood, thereby bestowing overall benefits upon ventilation function, diaphragm range, respiratory function, and gas metabolism.

Experiments show that three months of practicing Wuqin Xi Health Qigong was enough

to lower the tranquil state respiratory rate of practitioners, while six months of practice raised their lung capacity. Likewise, the ventilation rate of the lungs decreased in the course of three months. Experiments also showed that Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong had this same effect of increasing vital capacity after six months of practice. All of this data confirms that health qigong practice can have obvious effects on the body's ventilation and gas exchange functions.

## **Slowing Senility**

With increasing age, many physiological functions decline. The complex structure and function of the human body irreversibly degrades. The main physiological changes that take place include a decline in muscles' working ability, bone density, blood circulation, cardiac function, nervous system function, and resistance to stress and autoimmune disorders. Plenty of research indicates that moderate exercise is beneficial for preventing premature senility and improving physiological and psychological function, generally helping to prevent disease and prolong life by improving health.

After practicing Wuqin Xi Health Qigong for three to six months, the body fat percentage of female subjects decreased and their bone density increased. The participants also improved in the length of time they were able to stand on one leg with their eyes closed as well as in back strength. Effects of Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong practice recorded included improving the body's measurements by decreasing the fat content of the waist and hips, as well as improving reaction time, limb strength, flexibility, balance, and coordination. Effects of Liuzi Jue Health Qigong recorded include improved stride, grip, and side-jumping ability as well as loss of body fat.

Therefore frequent health qigong practice can effectively improve bone metabolic disorders in middle-aged and older people, as well as strengthen the upper and lower limbs, while delaying and preventing the occurrence of chronic diseases.

Under normal physiological conditions, free radicals are removed by the immune system before they are able to cause harm. As the body ages its ability to regulate the balance of free radicals declines, however, leading to an increase in free radicals in the body. The vitality of superoxide dismutase (SOD) reflects the body's ability to remove free radicals. The progress of senility is also closely related to the peroxide levels of lipids. Malonic acid (MDA) is the index that reflects the peroxide level of cell membrane lipids. Thus, reduced MDA indicates healthy cell membranes, which slows senility. Therefore, SOD and MDA are two important physiological indices for studying the progression of senility.

The blood of Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong practitioners showed an increase in SOD and a decrease in MDA. Yi-Gin-Ching Health Qigong had the same effect of decreasing MDA. The effect of this decrease is to inhibit the peroxidation of lipids, alleviating damage to cells and tissues and improving the ability of SOD to remove free radicals. Thus health qigong effectively eliminates free radicals from the body at the same time as it heals the damage they cause.

## **Reversing Cardiovascular Disease**

Health qigong qualifies as light to medium intensity aerobic exercise. It improves the flexibility of muscle and adipose tissue and shifts the balance of HDL and LDL cholesterol. This shift facilitates the degradation of cholesterol deposits on the walls of the blood vessels, effectively preventing the development of arteriosclerosis, high blood pressure, and other adverse cardiovascular conditions.

Experimental measurements of practitioners' blood levels of high-density lipoprotein during the course of practicing Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong showed measurable improvements. The indices of third glyceride, total cholesterol (TC), and atherosclerosis (AS) decreased as well. In women, TG and TC decreased, while HDL-C increased. These results indicate that long-term regular practice of health qigong can improve plasma lipid and lipoprotein levels, manifested as a decrease in the concentration of TG, TC, and LDL-C and an increase in the concentration of HDL-C.

For females who practiced Wuqin Xi Health Qigong for six months a sharp decrease in the TG index and an improvement in the ratio of HDL and LDL was measured, indicating that health qigong can play a beneficial role in improving fat metabolism disorders.

## **Chapter 7 Health Qigong and Psychological Health**

As implied by the WHO's definition, "health" encompasses psychological and social dimensions as well as physiological ones. Therefore, taking up exercise for the pursuit of health should imply the pursuit of psychological and social well being in addition to physical fitness. The research shows that health qigong improves the practitioner's psychological state as well as physical. Also, communication and cooperation within the practice group plays a positive role in improving the practitioners' interpersonal communication ability and social adaptability.

### ***Health Qigong and Cognitive Ability***

The process of understanding the world makes up the content of cognitive psychology, which distinguishes between cognition as a psychological process and "knowing" as a philosophical concept. What we call intelligence is a kind of comprehensive cognitive ability, consisting of attention, observation, memory, imagination, and thinking ability.

### **Preventing Intelligence Decline**

The development rate of human intelligence is not uniform. In one study, results of three different intelligence tests were tracked for 36 years for a group of individuals. The results showed a rapid increase before the age of 13, followed by slower development until age 25. Intelligence as measured by the tests leveled off between 26 and 35, where it began to decline. The overall trend is an ascending phase, followed by a maintaining phase and then a declining phase. These results indicate that the decline of intelligence is a natural process. In recent years, however, research into senile dementia has revealed incidences of the process being reversed.

Keep in mind that the rate of cognitive development is actually different for each individual. For example, many people develop indications of farsightedness in their early forties, by which time their hearing has declined to some degree. Different abilities also develop at different rates. Abstract thinking is the latest cognitive ability to develop, and under ordinary circumstances it does not develop quickly until middle school age. And while some people's abstract thinking ability starts to decline at an early age, some people are still quite active abstract thinkers in their sixties or seventies. Similarly, there are differences in the rate of development of senility between individuals. This is not merely due to congenital factors such as heredity (which do play a role), but also to behavioral factors such as learning to use the brain effectively, continually absorbing new knowledge, maintaining a sound mind, and exercise, all of which are factors in slowing the rate of physical and mental decline.

After three months of practice of health qigong, participants had improved in their ability to distinguish numbers and symbols and perform mental arithmetic. After six months of practice, reaction speed had improved along with the ability to memorize figures. All of these measurements are key components of traditional IQ tests. Thus it is indicated that long-term health qigong practice can effectively slow the rate of decline of intelligence associated with senility.

## **Improving Attention**

Attention is the factor that determines whether a person can carry on every other type of psychological activity smoothly. It is impossible to comprehend an article or solve a math problem if the attention is elsewhere. Concentration, or the focusing of the attention, is required to complete these activities. In daily life, many people do not achieve their full working or studying efficiency, not because of a lack of intelligence but because of a deficit of attention, which results in an inability to bring their full cognitive ability to bear. The main symptoms of many neurosis patients are lack of energy and lack of attention. These are also common manifestations associated with a condition of sub-health.

Health qigong has beneficial effects on attention. The three regulations actively exercise the attention, focusing it on the breath or certain images or parts of the body while actively excluding certain types of thoughts. The state of mental tranquility achieved through practice is measurably different from ordinary waking consciousness. Its features are cyclical mental activity, the elimination of distractions, stability of the attention, steadiness of mood, and feelings of comfort and contentedness. Thus, the improvement of the attention that accompanies health qigong practice, coupled with the corresponding improvement of physical condition and vitality, can improve the practitioner's working and studying efficiency, bestowing equal benefits to confidence and work and study habits.

## **Forging Imagination**

The practice of health qigong invokes the power of the imagination as well as the attention by means of such elements as eliminating distracting thoughts, achieving mental tranquility, guiding internal qi, and actively relaxing the body. Certain exercises also invoke the imagination in specific ways, such as the tiger exercise of Wuqin Xi Health Qigong, which evokes the image of a majestic tiger in the remote forest strengthening up and preparing to hunt. Other examples are the bird exercise, which evokes the image of a white crane spreading its wings to fly, and the ape exercise, which evokes the image of a clever and vigorous ape climbing and swinging freely.

Psychology defines imagination as the process of refining and rearranging mental images. Thus, the qigong visualization activities actively exercise the brain, slowing the rate of cognitive decline.

## ***Health Qigong and Mood Regulation***

A proverb says humans have seven emotions and six sensory pleasures. Emotions are a part of the process of experiencing the world, from happy to sad to worried to horrified. Mood is the index of a person's psychological and emotional state. Although it is inevitable for all of us to experience pain, worry, fear, and sadness, a habitually negative mood has deleterious effects on health.

### **Mood's Effects on Health**

An American psychologist by the name of Erma once designed an experiment to capture the exhaled breath of people in different emotional states. When the breath was condensed into water, the results were different depending on the emotional state of the person at the time the breath was captured. Breath from calm subjects turned into clear, colorless water, while breath from sad subjects had a white deposit. Even more interesting was that the breath from an angry person condensed into a purple-colored water, which proved to be lethal when injected into a mouse. Erma's explanation was that the physiological reaction to anger stimulates the body to release toxic matter, which could erode immune system function and cause people to become sick. This hypothesis has been borne out by Japanese research which shows that people who lose their tempers often have lower immunity to cancer cells, while a positive mood is a miraculous drug that rejuvenates the whole body.

The reason that mood is so closely related to health is that the mood sets the state of the whole body, from respiratory to digestive to endocrine system, from metabolism to tissue. TCM lists seven internal causes (joy, anger, worry, thought, grief, surprise, and fear) and emphasizes the close relationships between afflictions of the internal organs and imbalances of the seven emotional factors.

Wishing a good mood for ourselves and others comes naturally. But as the proverb goes, in nature there are unexpected storms, and in life there are unpredictable vicissitudes. Since we cannot avoid the frustrations of life, negative moods are inevitable.

Contemporary health psychology holds that a mentally healthy person is not always in a happy mood but is optimistic in most circumstances. Just as the base line temperature of the human body is 37 degrees Celsius, the base line mood of a healthy person is optimism, and when negative moods occur the person can be expected to recover quickly. This ability to regulate mood is a basic characteristic of a mentally healthy person. Learning how to regulate mood is an effective way to increase psychological health.

## **Health Qigong's Contribution to Mood**

Long-term health qigong practice strengthens the stability of a person's mood and reduces nervousness. One exercise that accomplishes this particularly effectively is the first movement of Yi-Gin-Ching Health Qigong, “wei tuo xian chu”, holding the palms in front of the chest and wearing a serious expression. Another is “qing long tang zhao”, which helps regulate liver function as well as mood.

Sports research also indicates that different types of exercise can have different effects on the body. For example, bicycling, swimming, and jogging improve cognitive function, but qigong and tai chi chuan are more beneficial for improving mood. Also, after six months of practice of health qigong the different psychological indices for horror, human relation, anxiety, and hostility had shown different levels of improvement.

Not only does the practice of health qigong improve mood, but the learning process itself also has positive effects on the whole being.

The four types of health qigong contain the essence of traditional Chinese culture. Although the creators may have considered the movements to be simple, they take time and effort to learn, particularly for people beginning in middle age and older, providing a positive mental and physical challenge.

Consider the animal movements of Wuqin Xi Health Qigong, which require not only regulation of the physical posture but also regulation of the mind to move energy within the body and to generate an aesthetic feeling. It is actually quite a challenge to learn to do all of this well. But of course, the satisfaction and pride that accompanies the accomplishment is proportional to the difficulty. This sense of satisfaction and accomplishment compounds the beneficial psychological effects of the practice itself.

## **Psychological Explanation for Health Qigong's Effect on Mood**

The “three regulations” of health qigong correspond with the “three mood factors theory”, which holds that mood is determined by environmental events (stimulating factor), physiological state (physiological factor), and cognitive processes (cognitive factor). Among these factors the cognitive is most important for determining mood. For example, a person who sees a tiger (stimulating factor) will react according to various cognitive factors, such as whether the encounter takes place in a zoo or in the woods.

Mind regulation involves regulating the content of cognition in order to reach a state of mental tranquility. There are many different techniques of mind regulation, mostly related to the act of changing cognition, for example by using spoken suggestions like “relax” or “quiet”. This is one reason that health qigong is beneficial to psychological health.

Breath, the only internal organ function regulated by conscious control, can be

regulated in rhythm and depth. Body regulation, breath regulation, and suggestions all help the body to relax and breathe smoothly by calming the autonomic nervous system, which affects mood.

## ***Health Qigong and the Optimization of Character***

Character is the personality feature most closely related to society, and thus it contains social and moral elements. It corresponds to the attitude of people towards reality and the world around them and is typified by behavior. For example, when someone is in trouble, some people are inclined to offer help, while some are inclined to be indifferent and others are inclined to seek a profit from the misfortune. Such inclinations are manifestations of a person's basic attitude, or character.

Character is also related to moral values and the degree of selfishness or selflessness of a person. Character is not a constant but is gradually formed and somewhat adaptable.

## **Cultivation of Morals**

Since ancient times qigong has been practiced not simply to strengthen the body and prolong life for its own sake, but also as a means of pursuing a noble state of refined sentiment and self cultivation. The unity of humans and nature, an integral principle in qigong theory, implies that practitioners should cultivate their objectivity and work to improve their character. It also follows from this that practitioners should cultivate a healthy personal lifestyle and seek a happy psychological state and harmonious interpersonal relationships. A tranquil state under the influence of a noble mind is the guiding principle that leads the body unerringly to a state of optimal well-being, and is the aim of health qigong.

Only by cultivating moral values is it possible to maintain a tranquil mood. Qigong cosmology places human beings squarely within the cosmos and nature as well as within the social environment, in alignment with TCM philosophy. Long-term health qigong practice therefore molds the temperament while it strengthens the body.

## **Effects on Type A Personalities**

Research has revealed character to be an important basis of mental and physical health, influencing everything from the chances of contracting a particular disease to the length of its course. Character is the intermediate factor that relates stress and health.

Character determines whether we are carefree under pressure or whether we worry ourselves into a state of illness. Character is an indispensable part of personality. Research into the relationship between Type A character traits and mental and physical health has drawn a lot of attention.

The definition of a Type A personality stems from the heart disease research of two American scholars, Fried and Rosonman, who divided their subjects into two types, Type A and Type B, based on certain behavioral traits. Type A traits included impatience, excitability, competitiveness, perfectionism, and busyness. Often those who tend towards these types of traits are frank and unintentionally hurtful in their dealings with others. Common habits, such as making indiscreet remarks and fist-shaking, can leave an overbearing impression. Type B traits tend towards the opposites of Type A traits, including low competitiveness, weak initiative, a slow and leisurely pace of life, calm reactions, patience, tolerance, and contentedness.

The behavioral traits of Type A personalities cause them to tend towards tense, irritable, and hasty emotional states, which has effects on physical health ranging from insomnia to migraines, digestive problems, and cardiovascular disease. The American National Hygiene Research Institution declared a Type A personality to be one of four major risk factors for heart disease, along with high cholesterol, high blood pressure, and smoking.

Psychologists suggest that people with Type A personality traits should slow their pace of life, reduce the demands they place on themselves, enjoy the fruits of their success, and give less thought to personal gain, success, fame, and wealth in order to balance their state of mind and promote good health. These recommendations are in line with qigong practice. Both ancient and modern health preservation techniques emphasize that preserving health is a matter of molding the temperament. The Taoist philosophers Laozi and Zhuangzi both advocated conforming to natural law, being content and indifferent to worldly gain, and discarding selfish desires, ideas, and worries.

Thus, consistent long term health qigong practice can contribute to overall health by reducing nervousness and diminishing Type A personality traits.

## ***Health Qigong and Interpersonal Relationships***

Although there is no single uniform definition of psychological health, there is a common understanding that it involves good interpersonal relationships.

## **Interpersonal Relationships and Mental and Physical Health**

Interpersonal relationships play a profound role in health. Harmonious relationships with family, workmates, friends, and neighbors are integral to a person's sense of happiness,

fulfillment, and security. Just as the proverb says, a fence needs the support of three stakes, and so do people need the support of other people. As children we depend on our parents, and as adults we depend on our friends. A person without the support of others tends to feel lonely, helpless, and distressed, which has a diminishing effect on psychological and physical well-being.

Interpersonal relationship quality is closely related to length of lifespan. In one American study where researchers spent nine years following almost seven thousand adults, a certain number died during the course of the study. Analysis of the data relating to social relationships revealed that the people who were the most isolated from others had the highest mortality.

One important way that good interpersonal relationships can positively influence health is by providing emotional support for people trying to improve their health habits. People living in solitude are more likely to smoke or drink excessively, for example, because they are unable to receive advice, support, and comfort from others.

## **Factors Influencing Interpersonal Relationships**

Many people are perplexed by the problems of how to build good interpersonal relationships, how to love and be loved and be accepted by others.

The situational factors influencing interpersonal relationships are appearance, distance, association frequency, and capability. Personality, however, is the strongest factor. Appearance plays an important role in the beginning of a relationship but less as communication increases, while personality increases in importance. As the proverb says, "as distance tests a horse's strength, so time reveals the heart". Personality plays a much stronger role than anything else in creating deep and long lasting friendships.

## **Health Qigong's Influence on Interpersonal Relationships**

The influence of health qigong on interpersonal relationships is indirect. Achieving a harmonious internal state allows a person to develop harmonious interpersonal relationships.

Physiology is the basis of psychology, and improving one's own physiological and psychological state tends to reduce interpersonal friction. The improvement of a person's physiological state can improve tense interpersonal relationships. For example, inadequate sleeping patterns and insufficient energy can make people more prone to lose their tempers and be quarrelsome, which can be helped by correcting the underlying physiological imbalances.

Health qigong also improves interpersonal relationships by optimizing a person's character through the cultivation of moral sensitivity and the molding of temperament. Noble-minded people are more patient and tolerant, tending to socialize well with others and have a kind heart, which is the most important factor in creating harmonious interpersonal relationships.

## **Health Qigong as a Platform for Communication**

Health qigong has the further effect of bringing practitioners together in a healthy social setting. China, like most of the developed world, is becoming an aged society, particularly in certain cities like Beijing and Shanghai. Traditional extended families have been turning into nuclear families and empty nests households. Decreased contact with family members and others, particularly after retirement, leave many older people feeling lonely, which has a detrimental effect upon their physical and psychological health.

Health qigong practice not only provides a path for practitioners to manage and master their own bodies, it also provides a platform for communication, a social group and language all of its own. As they enjoy sunshine and exercise, they also share understanding and communication about the ups and downs of life. Particularly among groups of older people, there is no generation gap, and they tend to find many common topics of discussion. The friendships formed broaden communication circles and strengthen social support. The exchange of thoughts and feelings disperses loneliness, as in the saying “Stick willows carelessly, yet they yield pleasant shade”. Though it may be an unintended benefit, the relationships formed through long-term health qigong practice provide fun and companionship, which itself directly improves the quality of life.

## ***Health Qigong and a Healthy Lifestyle***

As we have seen, health qigong practice can improve the overall functioning of the body and nervous system, but beyond this its effects penetrate to the heart of daily life and society.

The WHO's definition of health implies a tranquil spirit and a calm attitude as elements of health. An abundance of evidence points towards the fact that health qigong, by unifying the inside and outside of the individual, can help move people towards optimal health.

## **The Importance of a Healthy Lifestyle**

Lifestyle refers to the ways in which people go about engaging in their activities. According to a study carried out in Russia, the quality of health correlated only 15% with medical factors and 85% with lifestyle factors. The WHO classifies the proportion of different factors influencing health as 60% lifestyle, 15% heredity, 10% social, 8% medical, and 7% climatic.

By any measure lifestyle exerts the most important influence on health and longevity. Lifestyle makes the ultimate difference between a high quality of life and health and suffering from disease and senility.

Cardiovascular disease and cancer are the leading causes of death in the developed world. An investigation of 240,000 Beijing and Shanghai residents found an increasing rate of morbidity due to high blood pressure. A study of the autopsy results of over 300 deceased persons between the ages of 15 and 39 sampled from Beijing, Nanjing, and Ningbo revealed that 75% had developed symptoms of coronary disease, which happens to be four times the rate of Southerners. By contrast, in the 1950s, cardiovascular disease and cancer only constituted 17% of the causes of death, far lower than infectious diseases. Thus the relative morbidity of these diseases has been on the rise for some time. However, this trend can be halted and even reversed by lifestyle changes, which have been experimentally shown to reduce rates of high blood pressure by 55%, diabetes by 50%, and cancer by one third, as well as prolong lifespan an average of ten years. No greater argument can be made for the need to change irrational lifestyle habits into sound ones.

It is therefore necessary to understand the characteristics of a healthy lifestyle. The "Victoria Declaration" put forward by the WHO summarizes a healthy lifestyle as "proper diet, moderate exercise, no smoking and wine in moderation".

## **Health Qigong's Effects on Lifestyle**

The relationship between health qigong and a healthy lifestyle is encapsulated by TCM health preservation principles. Part of this relates directly to the WHO's definition, such as the physical movements of health qigong corresponding to the requirement for a moderate amount of exercise. Part of it is indirect, however, such as proper diet, which shows up in TCM, TCHP, and indirectly as well in health qigong principles.

## **Health Qigong as Part of a Healthy Lifestyle**

The components of health qigong are posture regulation, breath regulation, and mind regulation, all of which are guided by the principle that running water is never stale; in other words, good health requires movement. The basic purpose of movement in health qigong is to guide the qi and create a pliable body, which are achieved by moving with "a combination of relaxation and tranquility". It implicitly affirms that people should not exercise beyond

their body's physical capability, and take a rest if they feel tired. The standard of exercise intensity and energy expenditure is summed up by “sweat faintly, no panting”. The different concrete skill sets, Yi-Gin-Ching Health Qigong, Wuqin Xi Health Qigong, Liuzi Jue Health Qigong, and Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong, meet the requirements of aerobic exercise. However, the practice also entails the elimination of distracting thoughts, the calming of the mood, and long, deep, and smooth breathing. Thus health qigong has both distinct similarities and differences with other popular forms of exercise worldwide (see Table 6-1).

Type	Method	Psychological features	Postural Features	Movement features	Mechanical features	Level of intensity	Function
Aerobic exercise	Physical movement	Ordinary Waking Consciousness	Casual posture	Linear, discontinuous movement	Larger range of motion	55 - 70%	Strengthens cardiovascular system
Health Qigong	The Three Regulations	Tranquil State of Consciousness	Comfortable, deliberate posture	Slow, round, even, and continuous movement	Smaller range of motion	45 - 70%	Calms spirit, invigorates internal energy, improves overall well-being

*Table 6 - 1*

(Source: “On Chinese Slow Health Exercise”, written by Tian Maijiu, Xu Weijun, and Hu Xiaofei)

Health qigong practice can improve physical fitness, strengthen internal organs, relax the body and mind, and shed excess body fat, making it an integral part of a healthy lifestyle. Coupled with adequate rest and a nourishing diet, by cultivating inner and outer together it has a distinct role to play in improving mental and physical health.

## ***Health Qigong as a Bridge to a Healthy Lifestyle***

Turning a lifetime of poor health habits into good ones doesn't usually take place overnight, but is rather a process of transition for most people. Health qigong can function for these people as a guiding principle to lead to a healthier lifestyle.

## **Health Qigong Can Help in Quitting Unhealthy Habits**

Because health qigong practitioners tend to be health conscious, they tend to pay special attention to their lifestyle habits. It is a common thing to hear a health qigong

practitioner say “I exercise every day and don't smoke.” Temperance tends to come about as a natural result of long term mind regulation practice.

## **Health Qigong as a Way of Learning About Health Preservation**

TCM has been highly influenced by Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Modern experts in the field of natural health and longevity utilize these ancient teachings to enhance healing in areas in which western medicine falls short. Because TCM has been practiced for thousands of years, it continues to grow and evolve, and has become an extremely complex medical system in comparison to conventional medicine, which has only existed for a few decades.

Since health qigong is designed for the express purpose of improving health, practitioners tend to not care simply about precise technique but more generally about accumulating broad knowledge regarding health preservation that can make their practice more effective. At the same time, acquiring more knowledge about health preservation tends to make practitioners more enthusiastic about practicing, making the practice more effective and giving rise to a virtuous cycle of health preservation.

## **Health Qigong Balances the Psychological State**

The mind regulation component of health qigong requires the concentration of attention, the calming of the mood, and the elimination of distracting thoughts, all of which serve to negate the effects of unhealthy influences and strengthen the practitioner's ability to control his or her own mood.

The cultural context of health qigong is composed of principles including the unity of humans and nature, the way of neutralization, the doctrine of the mean, the balance of yin and yang, and the importance of molding the temperament. The basic philosophy holds that excesses of the seven emotional factors (joy, anger, worry, thought, grief, surprise, and fear) are detrimental to the body, and thus a quiet mind is best to hold. These principles run throughout the exercises, encouraging practitioners to feel contented and attain a state of psychological balance.

Most practitioners of health qigong tend to value the development of moral qualities. They don't strive to outdo others, avoid extremes, act out of kindness, maintain an open mind and a good mood, and keep harmonious relations with peers and society. All of these traits contribute to maintaining a balanced psychological state.

## Health Qigong Induces a Harmonious Society

The philosophy of health qigong connects the health and survival of the individual with the health and survival of the entire physical and social universe of which the individual is a component. The *Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic* says, "Yin, yang, and the changing seasons are the beginning and the ending of everything. Following them leads to harmony, ignoring them leads to disaster." The *Yijing-Wen Yan Zhuas* agrees that the only way to avoid being punished by nature is to harmonize with its laws, and that taking action on the basis of natural law is the only thing that can transform danger into safety. Such philosophies point to the idea that humans must develop themselves according to natural law in order to maintain a harmonious relationship with the universe. Through common activity and communication, health qigong improves the social psychology of its practitioners, contributing to the improvement of overall harmony within society. This acts in addition to the effects of temperament-molding and moral cultivation on the practitioners themselves.

Health qigong promotes the unity of body and mind as it preserves both. "Body" is skin, flesh, bones, etc. as well as physique and qi. "Spirit" is vitality, including cognition, thoughts, and interests. The *Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic* indicates that body and spirit form the basis for one another. In middle-aged and older people, physique determines sleeping patterns, one of the ways in which the physical state determines the spiritual state. Similarly, all spirituality-seeking activities, which include the pursuit of leisure and interest, are affected by the functioning of the digestive, respiratory, circulatory, and endocrine systems. Therefore, TCHP has always valued practices that mold both body and spirit, that combine relaxation and tranquility to achieve a harmonious unity of physical and physiological processes.

These functions of health qigong are distinct from those of conventional forms of exercise. As people gradually build up harmonious relations with nature, society, and their own beings, they naturally form healthy lifestyles and broaden the content of the "Victoria Declaration".

In ancient times people said that health qigong was for pursuing the Way. To modern science, health qigong is for pursuing the way of health preservation through a healthy lifestyle.

## **Chapter 8 Concepts of Health Qigong Practice**

Correct practice of health qigong leads to a healthy physique, increasing strength and curing illness. It can be of benefit to anybody, whatever their current state of wellness. Correct practice requires attention to many principles, however. This chapter will focus on these principles.

### ***Laying a Solid Mental Foundation***

A solid mental foundation is the basis of adequate health qigong practice and consists of confidence, resolution, perseverance, and regularity. Confidence means believing that you can. Resolution means deciding that you will, no matter what. Perseverance means resolving to keep going for a long time. Regularity means being consistent and thorough in your efforts.

#### **Confidence**

A key distinction that sets health qigong apart from other healing modalities, such as massage or magnetotherapy, is that the patient performs the therapy themselves, rather than passively accepting the benefits conferred by a healer. Any healing modality relies on the confidence of the beneficiaries, both in the modality itself as well as in the prestige of the practitioner. Through practicing health qigong, practitioners are able to act as their own healers, which has positive effects on confidence, further compounding the effects of the practice. But where does this confidence come from to begin with? In order to initiate this virtuous cycle of healing, the practitioner must have some foundation of confidence to grow from. Though the practitioner may have doubts at first, as long as there is a seed of confidence to grow from doubts will vanish as confidence increases with practice.

#### **Determination**

Some beginners in health qigong have little enthusiasm, just dabbling out of curiosity and without determination. They may slack off in their practice if they do not detect obvious benefits fast enough, and as a result they miss out on the benefits of consistent long-term practice. They may even quit the experience with unpleasant memories of sore muscles in their waist and legs leaving a bad impression. People who begin in a relatively healthy state

may be more prone to this pattern than people who begin in a weakened state, because they may not see progress as quickly and may be more prone to overstretch their body's limits. The functions of health qigong are achieved by gradually shaping physiological patterns, not by making drastic changes. Therefore, without a foundation of determination, a beginning practitioner may not have the opportunity to form a long-term habit of consistent practice.

## **Perseverance**

There is a proverb that says, the Way is easy to reach but hard to practice and harder still to persist within. It is easy enough to learn health qigong skills, but persisting with the practice is a higher level of difficulty, hence the necessity of perseverance as a component of the mental foundation necessary to achieve the benefits of health qigong.

The power of health qigong is that it relies on the practitioner's own initiative to regulate his or her physical and mental state. Such practice gradually strengthens the various physiological functions of the body, but the effects don't manifest overnight.

Achieving ideal results requires consistent, long-term practice, and there are no shortcuts to this end. Those who begin practice in response to a state of illness may cease practicing once they feel themselves to be recovered, or a person may stop after a long period of time simply out of laziness and loss of ambition. Hence the proverb that studying is like sailing against a current – either forge ahead or be driven back. The effects that are gained by consistent practice will degrade without it. Maintaining consistent practice for six months or a year is relatively easy compared to maintaining consistent practice over a decade or over a lifetime. Yet only such perseverance can unlock the full benefits of health qigong.

## **Regularity**

Ancient wisdom and modern science agree that health qigong can shorten the course of diseases, boost the curative effects of other treatments, and improve physical strength. It can help the ill become well and the weak become stronger.

However, it would be a mistake to think that health qigong is mysterious or omnipotent and able to cure all disease. To achieve the beneficial effects of practice, it must be approached with regularity. The body's healing mechanism involves a process, perhaps a long process. Being too eager to achieve results can hinder the effects of practice. In the course of practice certain sensations may arise, such as heat, cold, bloating, or stirring, or just the regular circulation of the blood and qi, all of which are normal reactions that can result from practice. They do not deserve undue attention or intent. Through the course of practice practitioners may also experience sensations, such as pain or bloating, which are also perfectly normal phenomena that deserve no special attention and certainly do not need to

be sought out. As a proverb says, ignore uncommon goings-on, as they will defeat themselves. As practitioners shed their physical and psychological burdens and continue practicing, negative manifestations will work themselves out.

## ***Principles of Health Qigong Practice***

The process of learning health qigong is a process of moving the body towards a state of optimization and increased order. The speed of this process depends not only on the quality of practice but also on the quality of understanding of the principles. Here we look at these principles in detail.

### **Unification of Body, Mind, and Qi**

The purpose of taking up exercise is to fully mobilize the body. As a type of exercise, health qigong is no exception. It differs from conventional forms of exercise, however, in that it explicitly seeks to unify body, mind, and qi. All of health qigong practice centers around this principle.

### **Relaxation and Tranquility**

Relaxation refers to a state of the body. It is the opposite of nervous tension. Tranquility refers to a state of the mind and can be equated with mental stillness.

“Naturalness” runs throughout the practice of health qigong: posture, breathing, thoughts, mood, and expression should all be natural. Following the guidance of natural relaxation and tranquility will prevent the practitioner from progressing in the wrong direction.

### ***The Significance of Mental and Physical Relaxation***

Mental and physical relaxation are essential conditions for the achievement of the beneficial effects of health qigong practice, as well as for avoiding the detrimental effects of stress upon the body.

Physical relaxation involves maintaining a stable posture and keeping the entire body in a tension-free state. On the one hand, relaxation benefits the circulation of qi and blood and reduces the body's consumption of energy. On the other hand, it reduces excitability, which has the effect of diminishing chaotic, interfering activity within the cerebral cortex, allowing the mind to enter into a state of tranquility, where it can most effectively regulate the body's processes.

Relaxation is good for the physique as well as for psychological and spiritual well being. A relaxed facial expression appears benevolent, amiable, and happy, which mirrors a virtuous, open-minded, and calm psyche. On the other hand, perpetually holding the face in a hostile, confounded, or nervous configuration creates tension within the body, leading to the deterioration of the physical state. This is an example of the principle of the mutual responsiveness between body and mind. Relaxation creates a foundation of positive mutual influence between body and mind.

### ***Tranquility is Achieved Through Relaxation***

Becoming free from desires is a prerequisite for achieving tranquility. It may actually have been easier for the ancients to achieve a state of tranquility, with a life pattern of rising and sleeping with the sun, little travel, and few and simple interpersonal relationships and aspirations. With all of the stimulation modern people have from new happenings, new information, and an abundance of relationships and material comforts, attaining a state of tranquility may not be so easy. Fierce competition and the fast pace of change compound the difficulties.

This is the reason for the rule “in mind regulation, put naturalness first”. This means to be happy, calm, and contented in daily affairs, gradually eliminating disturbing factors and cultivating an open-minded state. Being natural allows for relaxation, which is the way to tranquility.

### **Dynamism and Stillness**

The “combination of dynamism and stillness” refers to the dynamic unity of these opposites. In the context of health qigong, dynamism refers to the dynamic exercises and stillness refers to the static exercises. As features of health qigong practice these are opposite to each other, yet unified.

Static exercises are those that induce calmness, such as breathing, circulating the qi, and sitting in silence. However, the stillness of calming exercises is not absolutely still. While there is calmness on the outside, there is dynamism inside; qi and blood continue to circulate, thoughts dance their perpetual dance. This is the source of the saying “Condition vital essence, qi, and mind internally and condition sinews, bones, and skin externally.”

Dynamic exercise involves overall body movements, yet requires a calm interior, combining relaxation and tranquility. Since there are many ways for the human body to move, there are many kinds of dynamic exercises.

The combination of dynamism and stillness emphasized in health qigong practice corresponds to the unity of spirit and body in everyday life. In a sense, a human being is a trinity of body, qi, and mind. In daily activities each carries out a specific role. Health preservation consists of preserving the mind, smoothing the qi, adjusting the posture, and following the Way. Dynamic and static exercises alternate the focus and emphasis of practice, but a combination of dynamism and stillness is what optimizes life's functioning. Each practitioner should adjust the balance of static and dynamic exercises according to need and stage of progress. Teachers can give external guidance, but internal guidance should be primary.

## ***Obeying Natural Law***

As integrated components of the vast tapestry of nature, humans are better off when their actions accord with natural law than when they don't. However, "obeying natural law" can have many different interpretations.

## **The Connotation of Nature**

"Nature" refers specifically to natural law, a concept that runs consistently throughout health qigong practice.

Thinkers since ancient times have elaborated on the subject of natural law. The classic source of Taoist wisdom, Laozi's *Tao te Ching* holds that "humans follow the Earth, while Earth follows Heaven; Heaven follows Nature, while Nature follows the Way". This means that the Way governs everything and humans should follow the rule "let things take their course, and take no action against nature". It also means that the Way, or natural law, should be treasured by all creatures, as it sustains all and interferes with none.

Thus it can be seen that "nature is the essence" is an expression of the fundamental position of natural law in the universe.

## **Obeying Natural Law During Health Qigong Practice**

During practice, as well as during daily life, posture should be natural, that is, in accord with natural law, whether walking, running, sitting, or lying. Natural posture is relaxed. Natural movements are rounded and slow. Natural breathing is even, gentle, soft, and slow.

The understanding and application of natural law is one of the most important factors for achieving the full benefits of practice.

## **Obeying Natural Law in Health Preservation**

Health qigong emphasizes the harmony and unity between humans and nature, according to which people must act in accord with natural law, such as the cyclical emergence of yin and yang and the four seasons, in order to maintain psychological and ecological balance.

## **Obeying Natural Law and Preserving Vitality**

“Obeying natural law and preserving vitality” has two layers of meaning. One is following the changes of yin and yang and the four seasons. The other is following natural law to preserve health.

It is important to establish proper ideas about what it means to obey natural law. The human body contains both passive and active adaptations. Consider the response to an environmental temperature change. Passive adaptations would include changing clothing to accommodate. Active adaptations would include adapting to the change in temperature by improving the body's regulatory mechanisms. The two approaches lead to different life states.

Health qigong advocates that people adapt actively to advance and adapt passively to conserve, which preserves life's flow. As an example of this principle, in fall, when temperatures drop, cover the midsection to conserve the body's warmth, but don't bundle up too much, or else the body won't have a chance to adapt, causing shock when winter's cold comes. The reverse of this should be followed in the spring. Both passive and active adaptations conserve vitality, but they have different effects. Active adaptation drives gradual advancements in an evolutionary process.

## **Relaxation as a Principle of Nature**

Relaxation is a fundamental principle of nature. In the context of health qigong practice its purpose is to diminish nervous tension and allow for the coordination of the body's systems, facilitating a positive mental and physical state conducive to the unification of body, mind, and qi. Therefore, health qigong practice should be a process of continual mental and physical relaxation and involve smooth, natural breathing. It should not be pursued under pressure, as the nervousness produced will hinder progress. Other principles of health qigong practice include combining relaxation and tranquility, combining practice and cultivation, and proceeding gradually with unremitting effort. These principles have independent requirements, but all are necessary to ensure the best effects of practice. Only when these principles complement one another throughout the course of practice is progress maximal.

## ***Health Qigong and Health Preservation***

Health qigong practice exerts an obvious positive influence on the state of one's health, but practicing health qigong without paying attention to the principles of health preservation in other areas of one's life is counterproductive. Health qigong should be practiced as part of an overall health preservation lifestyle plan in order to receive the maximum benefit from both.

### **About Health Preservation**

Many methods of health preservation have been summarized, with a wide range of effects related to preserving health and extending life.

Health preservation has been widely thought and written about since the times of Laozi and Zhuangzi. One famous principle, put forward by Ge Hong (265-420) of the Jin Dynasty, is "health should not impair the body". Another famous principle is that of the "three appropriations":

- The "appropriation of mental activities" refers to the normal changing of the seven emotions (joy, anger, worry, thought, grief, surprise, and fear). Emotions that appear suddenly or violently or reach extremes of duration or intensity cause damage to the body and can trigger diseases or even death.
- The "appropriation of the five flavors" (sweet, sour, bitter, pungent, salty) means to maintain a healthfully balanced diet. An excessive or poorly balanced diet will cause harm to the body, so the appropriation of the five flavors includes moderating amounts and combinations of foods. Certain individuals have addictions to certain types of foods, and foods that are either too hot or too cold can have detrimental effects. Alcohol should be avoided.
- The "appropriation of physical labor and sexual intercourse" means not too much or

too little. Excess or deficiency, indulgence or suppression, both do harm to health. *The Yellow Emperor's Internal Classic* says that humans should form regular living habits and create a balance between rest and work, because lying for too long harms the qi, sitting for too long harms the flesh, and walking for too long harms the sinews. Much has likewise been written over the ages on the appropriation of sexual intercourse. Overindulgence results in a loss of vitality, which opens the door to illness, while total abstinence results in the loss of the body's sexual function, which also affects health.

Succinctly put, any excess or deficiency can cause disease. This is why health preservation pays attention to moderation and adjustment in all things. Anything used excessively can cause injury, and any internal or external factor that acts out suddenly, violently, or continuously, exceeding the normal ranges of the body's physiological mechanisms, is a detriment to the body's state and can result in pathological phenomena.

Health qigong practice will raise the body's standard of health, but not unless combined with sound health preservation practices in daily life and liberal application of self-care.

## **Health Qigong and Healthy Lifestyle**

Receiving the beneficial effects of health qigong requires “hard practice”. However, the fast rhythm and high demands that modern life places on many people can make it a challenge to devote long stretches of time to anything, let alone exercising. Even retirees have households and families to look after.

One way to meet the requirement of “hard practice” is to mandate a certain period of time regularly for “compulsory exercise”. By establishing a minimum baseline practice time you can be sure to gradually condition your body. But for those who are unable to reserve the time, this approach may not suffice.

Health qigong practice does not have to be fit into official sessions, it can take place at any time and place in daily life, and the effects are cumulative. In this way the practice can be merged organically even into the busiest of schedules.

For example, while waiting for a bus is a good time to practice the preparatory movement, and while doing housework is a good time to practice the rotation of the coccyx. One can also practice xiong huang (shake like a bear) while walking, or practice chu zhao liang chi (stretching hands and arms) after sitting in front of a computer for a time. One can even practice the hip-lifting movement of bei hou qi dian bai bing xiao from Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong while in the restroom.

As many practitioners have experienced, the movements of health qigong practice can and should be merged into daily life. By forming deeply ingrained habits of proper breath and body regulation, the effects of practice will accumulate gradually day by day.

As a part of society, a person has a need to deal with all kinds of public and private

affairs on a daily basis. It is our nature to label such affairs as good or bad, satisfactory or unsatisfactory, and our emotions change correspondingly. If we frequently overreact our mental and physical health will suffer. From the perspective of TCM, any excessive or lingering emotional reaction will upset the balance of blood and qi, resulting in interruptions of the body's various functions and opening the door for illness to enter the body.

This is why health qigong places such great importance on moral cultivation as a component of mental regulation. Moral cultivation demands that we continuously monitor our state of consciousness in daily life, staying as close as possible to a state of quiet and neutrality.

Lifestyle choices determine health. The full benefits of health qigong cannot be realized unless regular practice is complemented by a healthy lifestyle.

A healthy lifestyle includes adopting clothing to suit seasons and climate. For example, in winter dress warmly around the midsection and neck rather than try to resist the cold.

During health qigong practice, wear loose clothing and soft shoes. Maintain a balanced diet and do not overeat or undereat. Avoid unhealthy foods as well as smoking, drinking, and other unhealthful addictions. Keep indoor air fresh and not too dry or moist, and rest after physical or mental exertion.

## **Relaxation in Daily Life**

Relaxation and tranquility are closely related and cannot exist without each other. Complete physical relaxation requires complete mental tranquility and vice versa.

Relaxation should take place not only during health qigong practice but throughout daily life as well. Though the state of health qigong practice cannot be maintained constantly, we can constantly strive to be as relaxed as possible, which over time will become habitual, helping to preserve a peaceful, calm state.

### ***Using Body Movements to Relax***

When mental focus alone isn't enough to achieve relaxation, using body movements can help. As an example, try "sitting like a clock and lying like a bow", where you lie on one side and raise your upper body. This movement requires a high degree of relaxation and is good for revealing hidden tension.

## ***Using Language to Relax***

Thinking too much can get in the way of practice, especially if you think of things that disturb you, such as frustrations at work, annoyances in life, or interpersonal disputes. Since such distracting ideas hinder relaxation and tranquility, using the technique of “one idea”, that is, focusing the concentration on just one thought, is useful to help get rid of them.

An example of this is the silent reading method, which can be used after the warm-up exercise. You might focus on repeating the words “silence, silence,...” or “relax, relax,...”, experiencing the words with your entire body. Skilled use of this method can make it very easy to enter a state of tranquility.

## **Chapter 9 Precepts of Health Qigong Practice**

Instructors and environment can provide the stimulus, but the crystallizing factors that determine how much benefit is received from practice are the practitioner's own beliefs and attitudes. There are a number key precepts that, if internalized in the form of attitudes and beliefs, will maximize the benefits received from health qigong practice.

### ***Discard Mental Burdens***

Psychological preparation must precede practice in order to free the practitioner of mental burdens. When beginning practice there should be no pressing worries on the mind. This ideal might not be reachable right away, but can be reached through moral cultivation.

### ***Relax Body and Mind Completely***

Body and mind mirror one another, but to induce relaxation it is easier to start by relaxing the body. The reason is that a relaxed body creates the conditions for a peaceful mental attitude. Put another way, the mind cannot relax unless the body does first.

### ***Proceed Gradually***

Although the movements of health qigong are simple, mastering them takes time, and realizing the ideal state takes even more. Being overeager for results is a hindrance. Time is a key ingredient. This is the meaning of proceeding gradually.

Each of the three regulations should progress gradually. When learning the movements, advancement should happen little by little. Plenty of time should be allowed for internalizing the detailed points relating to each movement.

Breath regulation begins after the movements are memorized. Breathing and movement are brought in sync with each other. Each inhale should bring in calmness. The breath should be even, gentle, soft, long, and fluid. Achieving such a state takes continual practice over time. Being harsh with yourself or seeking daily improvements will only hinder your progress.

Mind regulation follows after breath regulation. Ideas are brought in sync with breath and movement. Thought should become light rather than heavy. Practice eventually achieves thoughts so light they can barely be felt (nicknamed “no-thoughts”). Practice progresses this way, in the direction of increased synchronization of movement, breath, and thought and from heavier thoughts to lighter thoughts to no-thoughts.

Beginners, especially those practicing with the intention of overcoming a specific health challenge, often watch day by day and session by session for improvement to occur, but if their impatience disturbs their mental tranquility it will have a detrimental effect on progress. Therefore it is best to practice without thinking of progress, benefits, or effects. This, ironically, is the way to progress the fastest.

Therefore, if progress is being tracked in some way it is better to do it at longer intervals of time, rather than session by session or day by day. This way the process is not rushed.

Intensity and duration of practice should be increased gradually, according to the individual's physical condition. Practicing beyond the limit of physical strength is detrimental.

The purpose of intentionally progressing gradually is to counteract overeagerness. Wanting instant success will only slow things down. Gradual advancement and perseverance complement one another.

## ***Inject Perseverance Throughout Practice***

The single most important factor for making progress, and the main reason that some practitioners progress faster than others, is perseverance. Without unremitting effort progress will not be made and benefits previously gained will be lost.

Practitioners can adjust their own practice regimen under the guidance of instructors. Instructors can help teach practitioners to eliminate distracting thoughts, and practitioners can arrange place and time settings for practice that minimize their own sources of distraction.

The function of an instructor is insignificant if a practitioner cannot persist. Persistence is a manifestation from the inner world of the practitioner. Practitioners who deflect from the principle of perseverance find themselves stuck.

The principle of perseverance can be taken to heart by adopting a suitably compelling purpose for practice, one that the practitioner will not be tempted to abandon.

During qigong practice the practitioner enters a state of consciousness that is distinct from both sleep and ordinary waking awareness, characterized by tranquility of the cerebral cortex, a state which is neither excited nor shut down but rather smooth and orderly. The more time one spends in such a state the more the mind and body will thrive together. However, such a condition can only be obtained gradually, through long-term practice.

Therefore, rather than setting up a particular health goal ahead of time, it is better to commit to persevere with practice and simply observe the effects over time. Establish perseverance first as the primary principle guiding your practice, and remember that perseverance cannot be established without a duration, and you will find the quality of your health increasing.

Injecting the principle of perseverance throughout your practice will temper your willpower, which itself is a compounded benefit of practice. In addition, being noble-minded and strong-willed makes anything easier to learn. Thus strategically applied perseverance accelerates the body's progress in strengthening itself.

## ***Be Intentional About Choosing Exercises***

There is a wide variety of qigong exercises, and practitioners should choose from among them according to their individual needs. Though the exercises are individually easy to learn, beginners may still be at a loss when it comes to the selection of appropriate exercises.

Every health qigong exercise has advantages and limitations. They all coincide on the level of basic principles, but each exercise has a different emphasis. For example, Wuqin Xi Health Qigong emphasizes imitating the movement characteristics of five animals, while Liuzi Jue Health Qigong emphasizes the exchanging of the breath.

Despite the difference in emphasis, all of the exercises have the same aim and the same means, namely to strengthen the body by regulating and preserving the qi. Yet some skills are more complicated and take more time to learn, while some are simpler and faster to learn. Some are more or less suitable for different constitutions, states of illness, interests, and other conditional factors. Choosing the appropriate exercises in accordance with these factors will maximize the results of practice while minimizing the effort expended, while choosing exercises aimlessly will increase effort and diminish results, and might even have detrimental effects. For example, those who are very sick and weak should start with lying exercises before progressing to sitting or standing, as they consume less strength and are most conducive to relaxation. People of good health and constitution, however, are better off starting with standing or walking exercises.

## ***Subdivide the “Three Regulations”***

As the arrangements of health qigong are various, so are the ways of practicing. However, the “three regulations” are a common theme of all health qigong exercises. The goal of the three regulations is the unity of spirit, qi, and body.

Adopting the simultaneous regulation of mind, breath and body is no mean feat to

master, and beginners often experience the difficulty of attending to one regulation only to lose track of the other two. Subdividing the three regulations means practicing body regulation first by means of attention to posture, breath regulation second, and mind regulation third, to finally achieve the desired unity of spirit, qi, and body.

Each regulation can be further subdivided into smaller steps according to the state of progress of the practitioner. For example, the first step of body regulation is to memorize the movements, the second step is to correct them, and the third step is to link them to the breath.

Breath regulation can likewise be broken down further. Deep and slow breathing should not be overemphasized by beginners, and can lead to dizziness, shortness of breath, and respiratory spasms if overdone. Therefore, breath should be natural at the beginning and not place high demands on the respiratory muscles. The concentration should first be fixed on the movements, then gently expanded to incorporate the breath. Progress is driven by ideas and imagination rather than strength and willpower. The ultimate result of this progress will be a state of tranquility, in which body and spirit seem to both exist and not exist at the same time.

Subdividing the three regulations makes complicated movements easier, reduces the difficulty of practice, and speeds up the learning process. However, in actual fact the three regulations develop mutually, simultaneously, and inalienably. Body regulation can be separated from breath regulation by the imagination, but not in reality. The division is simply a technique for focusing the attention. Therefore, it is important to learn health qigong by following the main points, because trying to progress too quickly through the three regulations can be counterproductive. "You can't help a shoot grow by pulling it upwards." Only deep roots can produce luxurious leaves. Only consistent, gradual progress will produce the expected effects. This way seems slow, but in fact it is fast compared to the alternative, and will over time lead to the state of "no regulation".

### ***Stress the Features of Each Skill***

Each health qigong skill has special characteristics in terms of theoretical basis and emphasis. Therefore, practice requires attention not only to the fundamental principles of all exercises but also to the special features and main points of the individual skill being practiced. Likewise, each of the four main types of health qigong should also be practiced with emphasis on its particular features. Otherwise, the exercises will lose their core value.

For example, Wuqin Xi Health Qigong emphasizes the imitation of the movement qualities of five animals, while Liuzi Jue Health Qigong emphasizes breathing and applying the daoyin (Chinese therapeutic exercise). During the process of practicing Liuzi Jue Health Qigong the practitioner should focus mainly on inhaling and exhaling while allowing time for daoyin to occur. Furthermore, Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong emphasizes the full range of motion of the body, particularly the rotation and flexing of the spine, while Ba Duan Jin Health Qigong emphasizes the exercise of the basic physique and regulation of the viscera, and the practitioner should focus on the aesthetic qualities of the movements.

## ***Practice Hard***

Long-term, consistent health qigong practice confers numerous health benefits, but an instructor can at most instruct; it is up to the student to practice. As the ancients said, the teacher introduces the skills, but the practitioner acquires them through hard practice.

In general, practice will progress over time from simple to complex, easy to difficult, shorter to longer. However, greater intensity or energy expenditure does not equate to a better workout. It is not only unnecessary but unproductive to equate “hard practice” with exhaustion or burnout. The standards of what constitutes “hard practice” in health qigong are based on the condition and needs of the individual practitioner.

It is the responsibility of the individual practitioner to determine the appropriate level of intensity, difficulty, and duration of practice, based on their awareness of their own condition, and to increase the intensity of their own practice as they feel comfortable. In terms of overall progress, it is better to do a little today and little tomorrow than to do a lot today and none tomorrow. The body goes through a process of adapting to practice, as a result of which practicing at greater intensity and duration comes naturally over time. Overdoing it will slow things down rather than speed them up, like pulling on a shoot to help it grow. Practitioners who are feeble and ill should take particular care not to wear themselves out with practice. The state of the body after practice should be comfortable and pleasant, not tired or exhausted. The formula for managing practice load is thus simple: if you feel tired, rest.

The refinement of technique also progresses organically and at a self-determined rate. It is better to allow this process to happen over time, without pushing, than to strive to have perfect technique, which creates tension and nervousness. For example, in the posture *wo hu bu shi* (crouching tiger awaiting prey) of Yi-Gin-Ching Health Qigong, the hands and all ten fingers are pressed against the ground. This posture can be approached gradually by first allowing the knees to bend and pressing the fingers against the sides of the legs, moving comfortably into the full posture over time. The horse stance is another posture that is often difficult for beginners; when practicing the horse stance, it is better to begin in a high posture and gradually move down as comfort allows than to begin in a very low posture and overload the body's capacity.

The foundation of “hard practice” is to firmly grasp the details and theoretical basis of each exercise. Watch, ask, think, read, and learn continuously about qigong. Practice and watch others practice, and analyze. This is the way to ensure that you will internalize the principles, which is the foundation of “hard practice”.

## ***Be Mindful of Warming Up and Cooling Down***

Warming up serves the purpose of redirecting the flow of thought of the practitioners and shifting their physiological and psychological state from ordinary awareness to the state of health qigong practice. This transition is crucial for the exercise to have the intended benefits. Warm up exercises should not be done mindlessly or in a hurry, and certainly shouldn't be ignored.

The warming up exercise stimulates every range of motion and every internal organ, gradually improving the sensitivity of the nervous system and the flexibility and coordination of the limbs. It also serves to “re-boot” the cerebrum by re-focusing the attention on the subject of practice, helping to eliminate distracting thoughts and pave the way for achieving tranquility. This type of overall stimulation helps the different parts of the body awaken and coordinate themselves, as well as relax hidden tensions, all of which assists the flow of blood and qi, preparing the body to receive optimal benefit from the main exercises. Warming up exercises should be done with full attention, and of course, their duration and intensity should be determined by the needs and capacity of each individual practitioner, leaving plenty of energy available for the remainder of the exercise session.

The ending movements are likewise quite simple but very important. They make up a very significant component of practice.

The first purpose of the ending movements is to consolidate the effects of the practice session and help them settle in; also, since the different exercises focus the qi on different parts of the body, the ending movements give it an opportunity to re-balance itself. The second purpose of the ending movements is to allow the body to return to the normal state gradually so as to avoid sudden shocks to the system. The process of practice has been described as “diligent cultivation”. The ending movements are like the fruit of this cultivation. If the ending movements are neglected, mind, body, and breath will not be unified, over time promoting stasis and weakness. The promise of a strong, healthy body will not be realized.

Lest we till without reaping, the ending movements should always be observed with full attention and followed by a period of rest.

## ***Improve Theoretical Understanding and Cultivate Scientific Awareness***

Health qigong has several distinct features as a healing practice. In the relationship between mind and body, it emphasizes the role of the mind in guiding the body. Without the mind's guidance in all things, the body will be lost and slowly degrade. This is the first essential feature of health qigong. The second is that in the relationship between humans and nature, it emphasizes coordinated change and unity. The third is that in the relationship between individuals and society, it emphasizes coordination and moral cultivation, leading to the saying, “morality is the mother of practice”.

More than simply a way to overcome sickness, health qigong is a way of comprehensive cultivation of physique and character that relates to all aspects of each individual's life. Health qigong is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, drawing from its

many historical influences to inform its wisdom, including Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, martial arts, and medicine.

Therefore, despite the relative simplicity and small number of its movements, health qigong is a well-annotated, systematic exercise guided by a rich and comprehensive underlying theoretical framework. Since its inception it has been written that one key to practicing qigong well is to strengthen one's theoretical knowledge. One way to put this teaching into practice is to read the classics and become acquainted with the guiding principles derived from traditional Chinese culture, to in other words absorb the essence and discard the dross of the cultural context from which qigong derives its meaning. Only by understanding the big picture of health qigong as a source of philosophical insight can we truly practice it well.

As the knowledge of traditional Chinese culture is extensive and profound, arming our minds with traditional theory is helpful for guiding practice. However, modern scientific knowledge and methodology is developing quickly, and also has important contributions to make to our theoretical understanding of health qigong. Although the traditional teachings are very rich, they still contain superstitious elements which, if not discarded, will do harm to future generations.

Therefore, it is important to apply the teachings of modern science, including medicine, physiology, and psychology, to inform our understanding of health qigong principles in order to further the aims of our own practice.

## ***Create Good Conditions for Practice***

Success requires not will alone but also certain conditions, which have been classified as Fa (right method), Lu (emotional support), Cai (sufficient resources), and Di (right setting). Consider starting a business as an example. The way of doing business would be Fa, the support of family and friends would be Lu, Cai would be business capital, and the location of the business would be Di.

Likewise, the practice of health qigong requires favorable objective conditions. There are many methods of practicing qigong, which should be selected from according to the practitioner's condition and needs. The four types of health qigong standardized by the Chinese Health Qigong Association are all good choices of method. The process of standardization included the standardization of teaching methods, which ensures uniformity and cohesion of instruction across different places and times, with the intention of ensuring uniformly effective practice.

Second, find pleasant, like-minded companions to practice with. Good companionship not only makes practice more enjoyable but also improves the learning process and raises the level of benefit gained from practice. Joining a group can be a good way to gain these benefits, as long as it is a group that you fit in well with.

The practice of health qigong requires little if any financial capital, but does require

personal resources such as dedication, patience. and perseverance.

The ideal practice setting for health qigong is a quiet, comfortable place with fresh air and a green lawn, and regular practice environments should be maintained jointly by the practitioners. Crowded places, banks of rivers, balconies, rooftops, and windy hillsides are less than ideal.

### ***Form the Good Habit of “Harboring One Idea”***

There is a fundamental method for eliminating distracting thoughts, called “harboring one idea”, which actually has two meanings. The first meaning is a way of achieving tranquility by focusing the mind on a single idea, image, or sensation to the exclusion of all others. Once one becomes skilled at achieving mental tranquility this process can become almost instantaneous and automatic. But “harboring one idea” also refers to the habit of holding on to one key idea, insight, or good feeling from each practice session, so that each time you practice you have a new treasure to walk away with.

For example, this treasure might be the relaxed, comfortable feeling of tranquility, or it might be a deep insight gained into the nature of your body and mind.

This habit of “harboring one idea” will enhance the effects of health qigong practice as well as help to adjust the practitioner's daily attitude towards life in a positive way.