



Guelph Tai Chi for Health

What is "chi kung" or "qigong"

Definition: the work you do to produce energy or chi; cultivation of energy; breath work

Qigong is usually divided into two categories, *nei dan* and *wei dan*.

Nei dan: static, internal

These forms of qigong are performed internally. They include all kinds of practices that exhibit very little external motion. Meditation is one example of nei dan qigong. Think of the body switching from energy consuming to energy restoring. Nei dan is practiced standing, sitting or lying down. The movement of energy around the body in the "microcosmic orbit" or "Universal post" exercise is another good example of nei dan qigong.

Sometimes qigong is translated as "breath control exercise". This is very important in nei dan practice. The breath is controlled in four ways:

- Relaxing
- Focus is on abdominal breathing
- Sending breath to the abdomen by using directed thoughts
- Use of certain words such as "ohm", or the six healing sounds.

The mind is very focused. Five major ways of focusing the mind are:

- Focus the mind on specific acupoints - the top of the head (baihui), the soles of the feet (yongchuan)
- Focus on beautiful or peaceful images
- Focus on a specific person, idea, memory
- Focus on the sound and meaning of words like "relax", "be tranquil", "let go"
- Focus on specific lines, channels or meridians of energy



Universal Post - standing meditation

Wei dan: dynamic, external qigong

Like nei dan, wei dan uses breathing and control of the mind to stimulate the flow of energy through the body, but unlike the static postures of nei dan, wei dan involves movement.

Some examples of wei dan styled exercises would be our "Balancing the Heart Routine", the "Eight Pieces of Brocade", or "Guo Lin". The exercises are often targeted to a specific medical purpose such as improving the heart and blood pressure.

Tai chi is sometimes classified as a wei dan form of qigong.

What distinguishes qigong from other physical activities?

- No other exercise form (although yoga comes close) depends on the knowledge and use of the body's chi and meridian system.
- The exercises are based on theories of Oriental anatomy, and traditional Chinese medicine.
- The exercises are best done in an inward state of peace, and achieve best results when the body is deeply focused on correct posture, breathing, and concentrated mental involvement.

Why practice qigong?

We are all interested in preventing disease and maintaining good health. Practicing qigong regularly is said to be the equivalent of the "apple a day" philosophy we use in western medicine. By practicing this regularly we strengthen our constitution, and guard against premature aging. With regular practice we are able to reduce stress and maintain joint flexibility, good balance, and better resistance to common ailments. Qigong helps us prolong our life in a state of good health. We are in full control of our bodies and minds, and this makes us feel good about ourselves.

For further information...

There are a number of very good websites that will explain these and related concepts in more detail. Here are two:

<http://www.qi-journal.com/>

http://www.qigonginstitute.org/main_page/main_page.php

Some reading:

- Jarmey, Chris. The Theory and Practice of Taiji Qigong. North Atlantic Books, 2005.
- Jwing-Ming, Yang. The Root of Chinese Chi Kung. Boston: YMAA, 1995.
- MacRitchie, James. Chi Kung: Cultivating Personal Energy. Dorset : Element, 1993.