

Qigong – Chair Energy Movement Exercises for Peripheral Neuropathy (PN)

by Cynthia Woolston Maltenfort

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The Why

- *Recent studies have found that the slow, graceful exercises of Qigong - which originated centuries ago in China as a martial art, can improve balance and circulation, reduce stress and offer pain relief for a variety of ailments.*
- *The gentle and slow movements are used to open up energy channels in the body, keeping it strong and supple. These rhythmic movements also help pump energy throughout the whole body.*

PN – is individual, yet by opening up and sharing with each other; ideas, stories, things we've tried, things that have helped, things that haven't helped, we may be able to expand our awareness into the world of PN and ourselves. One thing is clear, we are not alone, and the only well-established treatment is movement and exercise. For me, the gentle practices of Qigong have helped to keep me moving and balanced in body, mind and spirit.

The Power of the Mind

It is well known that a positive frame of mind aids healing. There is ample evidence showing the powerful effect of mind over body. When practicing these exercises, one focuses on connection to the earth, clarity of the mind, and being moved by the heart.

Working on the coordination of these elements may help:

- Improve relaxation – so you can get into parasympathetic functioning of the nervous system – the “rest and digest” function, where healing can take place. When we are in sympathetic function “fight or flight,” energy is diverted away many from body functions to assist escaping danger, whether real or imagined (this includes stress).
- Uplift a person’s mood
 - *a smile tells the nervous system I am happy and safe, so more energy is diverted to parasympathetic functioning and “feel good” hormones are produced.*
 - *serotonin, oxytocin, endorphins and dopamine*
- To feel more relaxed and more positive, which improves the perception of pain.
 - *As “feel good” hormones flood our body, our perceptions shift*
- To be mindful of their intrinsic energy.
 - *This helps develop a greater sense of self-control and empowerment.*

GOALS WITH QIGONG: "Qi" = energy "Gong" = work

- **Improve circulation:** improve flow of blood and oxygen to extremities
- **Improve flexibility:** reduce stiffness; keep joints mobile
- **Improve muscular strength:** keep joints stable
- **Improve fitness**
 - Improve cardiorespiratory fitness: help strengthen the heart and lungs and increases stamina.
- **Bring balance to mind, body and breath**

BASKETS OF PRACTICE (from the 'Healer Within' by Roger Jahnke)

1. **Movement** – with proper posture or alignment
2. **Breath** – notice, adjust and refine
3. **Mind** – meditation and present awareness practices
4. **Massage** – usually self-applied

These "Baskets" of practice may be done in any order. You may choose to practice just one basket, or you may choose any combination of baskets that feels right in the moment. Learn to listen to your needs.

- **MOVEMENT practices include:**
 - Forms and exercises to increase circulation: move the harmful stuff out and deliver the good stuff (antibodies, white blood cells and other chemicals) where they are needed
 - Bouncing and shaking
 - Gentle movements to stay in parasympathetic
 - fast, sharp movements can signal danger to the brain
 - Movements for specific areas: hands, feet, connective tissue etc.
- **BREATH practices include:**
 - Developing a practice of noticing your breath
 - Powerful tools for occupying the mind and increasing circulation in... out... and through the body
 - Active and passive practices to bring balance
 - Passive breath
 - if tired, you might need to build oxygen levels with deep breathing – follow with an active breath
 - if you are feeling overwhelmed and need to calm down.
 - Active breath
 - To remove stagnation

- **MIND practices include:**
 - Present moment awareness: thoughts of past or future divert energy and may shift you into “fight or flight” – sympathetic function of nervous system.
 - Being present improves focus and concentration
 - Imagination and Intention - these are powerful tools
 - “Where the mind goes, energy flows”
 - What you “believe” can be a powerful force in creating your reality
 - Bring yourself present with intention, what you hope to achieve:
 - then imagine how it would feel if you had already achieved it.
 - How would it feel in your body, mind and spirit

- **MASSAGE practices include (Self – Applied)**
 - Tapping – holding – stroking – pressing/releasing – and friction
 - Treating areas:
 - From a distance – reflexology points
 - Ears, hands, feet = small microcosms of entire body
 - Locally: apply directly to area of stagnation or depletion
 - Techniques to increase circulation:
 - To deliver fresh blood and oxygen throughout the body
 - To flush bacteria out of the lungs and airways, and deliver antibodies, white blood cells and other chemicals where they are needed.
 - Mindfulness:
 - Pay attention to what you are doing and your intentions.
 - again “where the mind goes, energy flows”

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Follow basic guidelines

- Always practice in your comfort zone
- Modify – be creative: sit, stand, lay down, only do part... etc
- Keep your practice fun and simple
- Focus on relaxing

Today our practice will be done sitting in a chair (opt. block for stability)

CENTERING

- **3 Treasures:** Earth, Heaven “Big sky”, and Life
- **3 points of Focus:** Body, Breath and Mind
- **Body:** all practices will be more effective with good posture
 - **Feet:** well rooted, feeling connected to earth stability
 - **Knees:** soft, never locked (if standing)
 - when sitting at 90 degrees – line up with hips and ankles
 - **Inner lift:** vertically align pelvic floor and top of head
 - *remember to adapt – this may not be possible for you*
 - *you may need to use your imagination and that is OK!*
 - **Relaxed** outer body: shoulders, fingers, even skin...
- **Breath:** notice the inhale and exhale... relax and deepen
- **Mind:** pay attention...
 - Set an intention: feel as if you have already achieved it
 - If the mind wanders, bring it back to the body and physical sensations or the breath (noticing)

BREATH BASKET

- **Passive breath practice**
 - **3 PART BREATH: 1(I) inhale... 2(I) inhale... 3(E)exhale**
 - **1st Connect to the breath**
 - **(I) (E) Belly...** both hands on belly
 - *note: not all will feel anything, again that is ok
 - just use your imagination
 - **(I) (E) chest...** both hands on chest
 - **3 Part practice:** one hand on belly one hand on chest
 - **2 inhales** (belly, chest)
 - **1 long slow exhale**
- **Active breath practice**
 - **PULLING UP AND SHAKING OUT**
 - **(I)** make fists pulling up from the earth
 - **(E)** Down – to earth
 - out to sides – to life
 - up – to heaven

MOVEMENT BASKET

- **FLOWING MOTIONS:** gentle arm swings forward and back
- **WATCH CLOUDS PASS:** arms sweep across the middle, which engages both sides of the brain
- **CONNECTIVE TISSUE TRANSFORMATION:**
 - Improves circulation and range of motion
 - Flex, extend, and side bends: toward and away from body
- **SQUEEZE THE SPONGE:** contract and release
 - Improves circulation
- **CLAPPING:** RNP (Rapid Neurotransmitter Proliferation)
 - Improves brain function
- * note: we already did **Shaking**, which is a movement practice

SELF-APPLIED MASSAGE BASKET

- **EARS, HANDS, FEET:** sends reflex neurological impulses through brain & spine to organs and glands –
 - **HANDS**
 - Massage
 - “Valleys and ridges”
 - Twist, twist, pull
 - Wash hands
 - Need bread
 - Fluff a pillow
 - Pull a rabbit out of a hat
 - Squid – *it is good to cross the midline to get both sides of the brain working together*
- **“Tapping” or “cupping” whole body**

MIND BASKET – to help develop focus and concentration

- **Guided meditation**
 - Ex. White, Blue and Red meditation – to strengthen Wei Qi (protective energy field circulating around body)

Helpful hints:

PRACTICE DAILY

- Pick 1 or 2 from each of the baskets
 - Begin with centering and intention
- Learn to listen to what you need throughout your day
 - if you notice an imbalance (physical, mental, emotional, spiritual) add a practice to help bring balance
- Remember to follow the basic guidelines
 - Always practice in your comfort zone
 - Modify – be creative: sit, stand, lay down, only do part... etc
 - Keep your practice fun and simple
 - Focus on relaxing

Begin each practice with:

CENTERING – bring yourself into the present moment – you will get more out of your practice if you begin with focused attention and intention!

- **Posture:** root, lengthen, align
- **Connect to 3 treasures**
 - Earth – Heaven – Life
 - Body – Breath – Mind (heart/mind)
- **Set intention**

More practices:

LAUGHING: total mind, body, breath practice!

BREATH BASKET: when you take a deep breath, it pumps the lymphatic aspect of the elimination system

- 'Sigh of Relief'
- The Essential Breath: Abdominal breath
- The Remembering breath
- 4 and 5 Part breaths: belly – ribs – chest (we already did this)
 - 4 = adding a pause at end of inhale
 - 5 = adding another pause at the end of the exhale
 - This is a more advanced practice

MOVEMENT BASKET – for whole body

- Bouncing – gentle up and down
- Shimmying – side to side wiggling and giggling
- Side bending
- Twisting – if standing remember knees don't twist
- Connective Tissue stretching legs: flex and extending joints

- Other Qigong practices:
 - 8 Brocades
 - Organ cleansing

MASSAGE BASKET

- Other body reflexology areas: Hands and feet
- Abdominal massage
- Massage feet or other body parts with a belt
- Neck (often starting point for back pain and headaches)
 - Press with fingers at base of neck (both hands) – move head. Press in curve neck around fingers each side
 - Move up and inch
 - Continuing moving slowly up 1' intervals (4-5 bends)

MIND BASKET:

- Develop the ability to mindfully move through your day
 - Bring mindfulness to your practices
 - Add intention
 - Pay attention to sensations – including breath
- Practice meditation – to relax mind, body, spirit
- White, Blue and Red meditation – to strengthen Wei Qi (protective energy field circulating around body)
- Present moment awareness practices
 - Mindfulness during the other 3 baskets
 - movement, breath and massage
 - repeat Flowing motions –
 - see if you can bring in more awareness
 - May be its own practice
 - Listen to recorded meditations
 - May part of daily activities – just add mindfulness, notice physical sensations or follow the breath while
 - washing dishes
 - standing in line
 - gardening
 - even showering
 - the list is endless
- Mindful relaxation or other guided meditations

Helpful hints to prevents falls

1. Cultivate: "Present Moment Awareness"

- Practice checking in with
 - Body** (posture – head on straight)
 - Breath** (steady, relaxed)
 - Mind** (notice thoughts)
- Watch out for pets

2. Find all the hazards

- Remove rugs
- Keep pathways clear
- Improve lighting (turn on lights)

3. Manage health

- Rest: get good sleep
- Stay hydrated
- Check Eyes and Ears
- Manage medications
- Avoid processed foods, caffeine, alcohol
- Stay active – practice Tai Chi

PRODUCTS

1. Acupressure mats: mats with small plastic spikes to aid circulation and relaxation. Many sources available. www.shaktimat.com, www.amazon.com



2. Acupressure massage balls or dryer balls with sensory nodules that improve circulation. Ex. Shiatsu Spiky Massage 3.5" ball. <https://trainerswarehouse.com/toys-fidgets/balls-squeezies/shiatsu-spiky-massage-ball>



3. Percussion massage tools to increase circulation and flexibility. Ex. Hypervolt available from manufacturer and Amazon. <https://hyperice.com/hypervolt-bluetooth>



4. Slant Board to help stretch out the calves and improve posture. I like the StrongTek with its very grippy surface



Additional Resources:

1. The Healer Within Foundation: for Tai Chi Easy Practices

<https://www.healerwithinfoundation.org>

2. The Healer Within book

<https://www.amazon.com/Healer-Within-Traditional-Techniques-Meditation/dp/0062514776>

3. The IIQTC: for medical Qigong practices

<http://www.instituteofintegralqigongandtaichi.org>

4 Tibetan singing bowls

<https://tibetantones.com>

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