

## **Medical Qigong—NEW USES FOR TRADITIONAL CHINESE EXERCISE**

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**You've been told to watch your diet, take your vitamins, drink lots of water, and get enough rest.** Now you can add qigong to the list of activities that may prevent or reduce the effects of disease and help you stay healthy.

One of the treatments offered in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), qigong (pronounced *chee kung*) has been shown in numerous clinical trials to relieve the effects of such modern day ailments as heart disease, stroke, hypertension, cancer, loss of bone density, and senility.

### **QIGONG FOR GOOD HEALTH**

Qigong is relatively simple to learn and easy to do. Millions of people practice it daily for longevity and good health just as millions practice t'ai chi or yoga.

*Qi* is the vital energy of the body and *gong* is the skill to work with it. Some forms of qigong resemble meditation, in which the person sits or stands during the exercise. Other forms are more active, with specific motions made in a defined sequence. As in all of TCM, the goal is to remove blockages that stop or slow the flow of qi and to ensure an equal balance of qi within the body.

### **MEDICAL QIGONG**

TCM practitioners often prescribe qigong exercises along with acupuncture and herbal medicine. Medical qigong

includes meditation, physical motion, and breathing exercises.

With regular practice, people develop a sense of qi in their body and use their mind or intention to direct it. Some people become qigong masters who learn to emit qi from their hands and use this ability to help others.

In traditional Chinese medicine, qi travels along specific paths in the body called meridians. By measuring the electrical signals along these meridians, researchers have been able to document physical effects in the body as a result of practicing qigong. But researchers still wondered how these electrical signals translated into actual health benefits.

Several long-term studies were conducted among people who practiced qigong in the Peoples' Republic of China. Promising results so far suggest that these simple daily exercises, lasting no more than 15 to 30 minutes, can have valuable, long-lasting effects.

### **HIGHLIGHTS**

- **Qigong (pronounced *chee kung*) is one of the exercises used in traditional Chinese medicine.**
- **Many styles of qigong have been developed, some involve movement, and some are more like a seated meditation.**
- **Long term clinical studies have shown lasting improvement in patients who practice qigong daily.**
- **The effects of high blood pressure, cancer, and even some forms of senility have been reduced in studies of medical qigong.**
- **A practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine can help you find a style of qigong that fits into your exercise program.**

## **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE AND HEART DISEASE**

A 20-year study in Shanghai included over 400 people. About half of the subjects practiced a medical form of qigong for 30 minutes twice a day. All subjects took blood-pressure medication.

Over the study period, those who practiced qigong daily stabilized their blood pressure. Thirty percent of the qigong group were able to reduce their medication. The control group, which did not practice qigong, recorded increases in both blood pressure and medication. Only 20% of the qigong group experienced strokes during the 20 years of the study, compared to over 40 percent of the control group.

According to traditional Chinese medicine, older patients with high blood pressure often have a deficiency in Heart energy. This means that the qi traveling along the Heart meridian is not as strong as it could be.

A study evaluated the effects of qigong in 120 men between the ages of 55 and 75. The men were divided into three groups: those with high blood pressure and low Heart energy; those with high blood pressure and normal Heart energy; and those with normal blood pressure.

After a year of daily qigong practice, medical tests revealed that men who were deficient in Heart energy had significant improvement. In addition to better Heart energy, they improved the strength of their heart and the efficiency of their blood flow. The other two groups experienced no significant improvement.

## **BONE DENSITY**

Loss of bone density (osteoporosis) is another common effect of aging, especially among women. Bones can

become brittle and break easily. A study of bone density in men aged 50-69 showed significant improvement in those who practiced qigong compared to those who did not.

Bone density is often related to hormones. Studies among men and women have shown that qigong tends to restore the proper balance of male and female hormones. If new studies show similar results in menopausal women, those who practice qigong may be able to maintain healthy bones without hormone replacement therapy.

## **CANCER**

Ninety-seven cancer patients, each receiving chemotherapy, practiced qigong more than two hours a day for three to six months.

The qigong group showed improved appetite, bowel function, and significant weight gain compared to a control group. Immune functions were also improved in the qigong group but weakened in the controls.

## **MIND AND BODY**

One hundred people who were diagnosed with varying degrees of senility were divided into groups that practiced qigong or other forms of exercise.

After six months, 80% of the qigong group showed improvement in eight of the 14 symptoms of mental impairment. Only 45% of the control groups, which walked or jogged, had noticeable improvements in the same symptoms.

## **WILL QIGONG HELP YOU?**

A practitioner of traditional Chinese medicine can help you find a style of qigong that appeals to you and fits into your current exercise program. If you are hoping to address a health issue, the practitioner may suggest a course of treatment that includes qigong along with other therapies, such as acupuncture or herbal medicines.

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