

Chinese Healing Exercises

A Personalized Practice
for Health & Longevity



Steven Cardoza



Photo by Michael Shear

About the Author

Steven Cardoza has a master of science degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine, 1994 (from the American College of TCM, San Francisco). An alternative health provider since 1985 and a practicing Chinese medical physician (acupuncture, Chinese herbs, therapeutic bodywork, medical qigong, etc.) since 1995, he is nationally certified and licensed in California and Massachusetts. Steven holds numerous certifications in many styles of qigong and Wu taiji from living Daoist lineage holder Master B. K. Frantizis.

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A special thank-you to Michael Shear for his generosity of time and expertise in providing all the photographs that were used as the basis for the illustrations found throughout the book.

Author's Note

The Chinese understanding of the organs within the body contains, for the most part, the Western understanding of those organs. For example, they of course know that a pair of lungs are located in the chest, that they open to the nose and mouth, and their function is to bring air into the body, extract atmospheric oxygen for use within the body, and expel carbon dioxide as a waste product, exchanging those gasses with the blood circulatory system through tiny blood vessels surrounding the alveolar membrane deep within the lungs. Since the Chinese medical view also contains the concept of qi, a tangible if very subtle manifestation of vital life energy, there is necessarily an expanded view of the function of each organ beyond what Western medical science currently acknowledges, and other concomitants such as related meridian pathways for the transport of the qi of each organ through well-defined trajectories which also have their unique characteristics and special affinities between an organ and a specific body tissue. The Lungs have a special affinity for the skin. It is very common for someone with childhood asthma to develop eczema or psoriasis a little later in life, an observation that is one clear demonstration of that connection when viewed through the lens of Chinese medicine.

As the observant reader will see in the preceding paragraph, when I first mentioned the lungs, I used a lowercase l. Later, when referring to the Chinese concept of Lungs, I used a capital L. This is a typical convention used in many English language books about Chinese medicine, and one I will attempt to faithfully follow in this book. When the common Western understanding of an organ is being referred to, I will use lower case, but when referring to the expanded Chinese medical understanding, I will use an upper case designation. My intention here is to alert the reader to the distinction, especially for readers who may only be familiar with the Western perspective and may otherwise become confused when reading, as in the previous example, that the lungs have a special relationship with the skin.

Similarly, there are many other common English words used in special contexts, and they too will be capitalized. Some examples include the Five Elements/Five Phases: Wood, Earth, Fire, Metal, and Water; the environmental pathogenic factors Wind, Cold, Damp, Heat, Dryness; and other words used as Chinese medical designations or pathologies, as in the case of the word "blood." Seen in lower case, it is simply the common use of the word, but when used in upper case it has an expanded meaning: "The Qi is the commander of the Blood, but the Blood is the mother of the Qi", a well-known Chinese medical principle; and Blood Stasis or Blood Heat, two examples of Chinese-defined pathologies.

Introduction

A First Look

Through decades of teaching qigong (chi gung), taiji (tai chi), and other related practices, I've observed that while more people than ever want some kind of help or guidance in maintaining and improving their physical health, emotional well-being, and mental focus—and many are exploring alternative ways to accomplish that outside of conventional gym and exercise programs and Western medical interventions—most simultaneously have less time to spend in those pursuits. Making time to learn qigong, for example, or the more complex practice of taiji to the degree required to experience real health benefits is extremely challenging for someone laboring under the typical time constraints of modern life. The beauty of these simple yet versatile and comprehensive Chinese self-care exercises is that anyone can reap their health benefits in very little time. They are easily learned and gentle enough to be practiced by anyone regardless of age, gender, level of fitness, and state of health. The stated goal of each exercise is gained by practicing it just one or two minutes each day. They don't require much space or any special equipment, and while some personal instruction is always helpful and recommended, you don't need to go to a gym, yoga studio, dojo, or ashram to learn or practice them.

Most familiar Western exercises are designed to build muscle strength, flexibility, or aerobic fitness. Chinese self-care exercises provide many of those benefits while further building health and longevity by increasing the openness and functionality of muscles, tendons, ligaments, joints, the spine and nerves, internal and sense organs, glands, and meridian pathways. As the basis for a daily exercise program, you can use them to improve your general health safely and effectively, and enhance your overall well-being. You can select only the exercises that appeal to you, and get their full benefits by practicing only those, without requiring a longer course of cumulative sequential study and practice.

Exercises may be selected to work on a specific health challenge, to reduce pain, to get through your day with more energy and vitality, or to extend the healthy years of your life while minimizing and even reversing many signs of aging. They can be used by athletes and martial artists as warm-up exercises to increase fitness levels, improve athletic

performance, reduce the likelihood of injury, and speed recovery should injury occur. Health care professionals can use them for their own self-care, to prevent occupational burn-out, and to teach to their clients and patients who may want to take a more active role in their health care.

A Few Words about the Glossary

For those intending to read this book from start to finish, who want to better understand some of the terms and concepts you'll encounter, and the principles underlying many of the exercises taught here, it's recommended that you read the glossary now, at the start. While it does define concepts and practices, it's not a glossary in the conventional sense since it expands beyond dictionary-style entries and contains a wealth of foundational information that will help you get the most from these exercises, introducing ideas that are used throughout. This is the point at which I would typically present this material, but since not all readers will want such an in-depth introduction, and because it can be used as a handy reference as you progress through the exercises, it has been placed at the end as a glossary.

Practitioners of Asian medicine and intermediate to advanced practitioners of qigong or internal martial arts can readily save the glossary for the end, or refer to it as needed. Some exposition contained there and in the exercise instruction sections includes information that will have special relevance for readers with such experience. Those references are provided as supplemental information only, for people who are already trained and prepared to use it. Don't be concerned if you don't understand it; you will not lose any of the benefits of the exercises. Most of these terms should be relatively clear even for a beginner, and you will encounter them again in practical contexts that will add to their meaning. In some cases you'll gain an experiential understanding as you learn the exercises.

Some Personal History

Long before becoming an acupuncturist, herbalist, and instructor of taiji and qigong, I was interested in alternative health, martial arts, and various healing practices, especially those drawn from Asian culture and philosophy. In my early teens I took a few judo classes and began teaching myself yoga from books. In my late teens I learned Transcendental Meditation and Silva Mind Control, later renamed the Silva Method. While I had an affinity for and some natural ability in those practices, at that age I lacked the discipline to pursue them very far. Over the next few years I began studying taiji and qigong with numerous teachers who were well intentioned and even passionate about their practice, but most were not very adept or truly knowledgeable. While reflecting my own then amateur-level curiosity and lack of full commitment, I learned some helpful basics nevertheless.

In 1985, I learned the choreography and some other introductory components of the Yang Style taiji short form. Simultaneously, I became certified as a massage therapist, and my initial exposure to the subtle energetics of certain bodywork styles immediately sparked my interest. I studied both Shiatsu and Polarity therapy briefly, but focused more on Zero Balancing, studying as much as possible with its founder, Fritz Smith, MD, and on Craniosacral therapy, culminating in an intensive training with its founder, John Upledger, DO.

In 1987, I met the most accomplished qigong doctor I've had the privilege to know, Dr. Cho Wong. He directed me to study with the man who became my main qigong teacher ever since, Master B. K. Frantzis, a lineage holder in the Daoist Water Tradition. Beginning in 1987, I studied many styles of primarily Daoist qigongs, some medical qigong, qigong tuina, the Wu Style taiji short and long forms, Daoist meditation, Daoist longevity breathing, and other related practices.

In 1994 I earned a master of science degree in Traditional Chinese Medicine from The American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in San Francisco. Even as a physician of Chinese medicine, using acupuncture, herbal medicine, medical qigong, Chinese dietetics, and many styles of Chinese and other modalities of energy-oriented bodywork, I continued to seek the best training possible from the most accomplished masters in order to learn the most effective ways to help my patients and students while furthering my own cultivation. Some of these include Dr. Cho Wong; Dr. Hong Liu, author of *The Healing Art of Qigong*; Grandmaster Fu Weizhong, 13th lineage holder in the Emei Qigong tradition; Paul Dong, author of *Chi Gong: The Ancient Chinese Way to Health and Empty Force: The Power of Chi for Self-Defense and Energy Healing*; and Dr. Deguang He, of the New England School of Acupuncture. While not an exhaustive biography nor a complete list of my teachers, this will give you some idea of my background.

Exercise Selection and Sources

I selected these exercises from among hundreds I've learned over the years, to address every part of the body simply and effectively. I made sure that, unlike qigong and taiji, they could be thoroughly and accurately taught in a book format, and learned quickly. In addition to practicing them regularly myself, I've prescribed them to my patients and students, enabling me to verify their efficacy in hundreds of people facing a wide range of unique health challenges.

They are drawn from many Chinese sources, including An Mo Dao Yin acupressure self massage, Tuina/Chinese therapeutic massage, Ba Duan Jin/Er Shi Duan Jin Eight Brocades/Twelve Brocades, Yang Shen Gong nourishing life practices, Pai Da Gong tapping and patting practices, Daoist yoga, other simple Qi Gongs, and more. Note that the Chinese words given as separate syllables above are more properly joined into one word: Anmo, Daoyin, Baduanjin, Ershidianjin, Qigong, and Paidagong, and will be

referred to that way throughout the rest of this book.

Some of the exercises focus on a specific part of the body, while others influence the entire body at once. Some are practices that originated in other cultures and were assimilated by the Chinese, in a similar way as American ginseng, native to the United States, has become an integral part of Chinese pharmacology. For example, while not taught in this book, the half lotus and full lotus seated postures familiar to any yoga practitioner are common postures used in Chinese meditation practices.

I learned most of these from the American and Chinese qigong masters named above, and from a few other sources. They were usually taught as warm-ups, as adjunct practices that had their own benefits related to the main qigong or neigong being taught, or as something that would aid in performing the main practice properly. Sometimes a teacher would distinguish between the adjunct practices and the qigong, but often they would not, so many students came away with the mistaken belief that these are qigong practices, and with the best intentions, some have gone on to teach them as qigong. Frequently, I had more training and experience than many of my classmates and was better able to recognize the purpose behind a practice when that was not explained. Sometimes teachers were exclusively or primarily Chinese speakers who taught through an interpreter. In those cases I was often fortunate enough to have friends who spoke Mandarin fluently, who were able to clue me in to meanings left unsaid by the interpreter.

Sometimes, I did not learn the full purpose underlying a practice until years later. I frequently sought direct contact with advanced teachers, to see what I might learn beyond their basic curriculum. While I know most recognized my respect for their teaching, before sharing further information, some would question me, in part to evaluate the extent of my education, understanding, and cultivation. During one such conversation, I demonstrated a couple of simple arm and leg tapping exercises I'd learned years earlier, and the teacher smiled and said, "Oh, paidagong!" While I knew that practice was not qigong, it was the first time I heard the term "paidagong," so I asked more about it, researched it, and acquired a fuller understanding of many other tapping and patting practices I came to recognize as paidagong.

Understanding the Exercises and Their Progression

Everyone is unique, having their personal needs and goals. Differing approaches may be taken and different programs can be created to accommodate individual requirements. Understanding the exercises and the way they are presented will make that easy to accomplish.

Most of the exercises are laid out uniformly for your convenience. Each exercise's name is followed by a description of its purpose, physical and energetic benefits, and of the techniques used in that exercise. Whenever possible or useful, both Western and Chinese perspectives are included, so that people who may relate to one approach better than the

other will get the information they need, and people who appreciate both may better understand the correlations between them. Those descriptions are written with a minimum of technical language so everyone can follow them. The exercise instructions are carefully detailed, and most are accompanied by one or more illustrations, to make sure you're easily able to perform it exactly as intended.

If you are someone who likes to jump right in and just learn the exercises without reading the descriptions of purpose, benefits, and techniques used, that's completely fine to do. Performing the exercises well is what's most important, and you won't significantly diminish any benefit by not knowing what that benefit is or the theoretical basis for how it's attained.

While not an absolute rule, the sequence in which the exercises appear is recommended, especially when addressing any one body part. So for example, when working on the legs, it's best to begin with the toes, then the feet and ankles, and then the legs directly.

The general progression of exercises relies on a few considerations. They begin at the bottom of the body and work up. This is to create an open, supple, and strong physical foundation first. In many cases, a problem manifesting in the knees, or hips or low back, has its origin in the feet or ankles. Next, we address the body from the outside to the inside. This means both from the peripheral body parts toward the torso—as from the toes to the hips, and the fingers to the shoulders—and from the superficial to the deep. External, superficial problems are usually most recent and easiest to resolve, potentially removing obstacles to working on deeper areas. Similarly, fingers and toes are smaller than hips and shoulders, also making them easiest to work with. Finally, we move from the more obvious and physical to the internal and subtle, including the sense organs, internal organs, glands, and then introducing the more subtle breath and qi practices. Most people are best able to tune in to the familiar physical body parts first. With some encouraging experiences from those practices, it becomes easier to feel or otherwise sense deeper, finer aspects. Additionally, if a person has an injured, painful, or restricted body part, that can be a distraction when trying to focus on more subtle impressions, so it's best to alleviate those first.

The main exceptions to this progression are in the Exercise Prescriptions in the appendix of this book, where the sequence may vary for therapeutic reasons, and in the Whole Body practices in chapter 11, which may be used to as a warm-up to begin a practice session or to close a practice session at its end as directed. They may also be used as completely stand-alone practices at any time.

If you want to create a program for preventive health care and maintenance, address a particular health problem, or improve one or more specific parts of an existing taiji, qigong, or other health and fitness practice, then it's important that you have enough

understanding of what the exercises do in order to select the ones that best address your goals. Similarly, if you are a health provider, you will need to understand these exercises well if you want to teach them to your patients and clients, to help them best address their health needs.

Crafting Your Health and Longevity Program

Many people reading this book will currently be in good health with no obvious problems. If you're fortunate enough to be part of that group, you can take advantage of these exercises in the way they may be strongest, as preventive health maintenance, a way to increase your baseline of good health, and to promote longevity. Even in good health, everyone's needs are a bit different, and there is no one-size-fits-all approach. This flexibility allows you to use the exercises to their fullest advantage. Unless you are following Exercise Prescriptions to work on a health challenge or using the self-care exercises for special purposes presented in the next section, this is the way to craft a self-care program that will suit you best.

Go through every exercise, trying them all at least once. Look for two things when you do. If any exercise feels particularly good to you, include it as part of your daily practice. Your body is responding to something it needs, and your enjoyment is a reflection of a need being met. Second, look for any exercise that you are resistant to, that you don't like. There's a good chance you feel that way because that exercise is shining a light on a trouble area, something you might not be aware of that may take some work to correct, and you are feeling a physical or psychological resistance to opening yourself to that potential discomfort and work. That too is an exercise to include in your daily practice. Most people find that in a few weeks to a month, they come to enjoy those as their body begins to experience the benefits of the exercise. The other possible cause for resistance is that the exercise may be too simple for you, not getting into anything you need. Be completely honest with yourself when making that assessment, and revisit that exercise periodically to make sure you haven't discarded a practice that would in fact be valuable for you.

Despite individual differences, everyone's body structure is more or less the same. Be sure to include at least one or two exercises from every category and every chapter so your entire body is addressed each day. You can select different exercises from those categories daily or change them weekly, as long as the entire body is regularly addressed. Start with the ones you can do most comfortably, and add more challenging ones as you're able. Once you've learned them, you can do twenty exercises in just twenty to thirty minutes. A minimum of twenty minutes a day is recommended, and on days when you have more time, go as long as you'd like.

Everything in chapter 11, on whole body practices, should be learned and performed regularly, preferably daily. To varying degrees, all of them provide deep benefits for the

entire body. Many are introductory or preparatory practices for complete qigongs, helpful if you should decide to learn qigong farther down the road. By themselves, they provide more benefit on a qi level than any other exercises in the book, helping to keep you healthy from an energetic standpoint, and are the best for anti-aging and longevity purposes. They may require a bit more work and time to learn to perform them properly. If you ever need them to address a health problem, it's best to already know how to do them well.

If you become injured or ill, remember that addressing the injury or illness must always take priority. Do the exercises that best facilitate your healing and recovery first. Once your health is restored, you can safely resume your practice.

Self-Care Exercises for Special Purposes

1. Preventive Maintenance: Stabilize and Improve Your Health Holistically

Prevention of a disease or other health challenge is always preferable to curing it once it has occurred. That's what is meant by the Chinese proverb "Dig the well before you are thirsty." Of course, we all come into this world with our own strengths and weaknesses, things subject to our personal constitution and genetic makeup. You are unique, and as such, a holistic outlook will give you the best chance of maintaining and improving your health.

In its fullest sense, holism as practiced by the Chinese involves seeing the connections among all things, all of the interrelated factors that influence a person's health, not only the more subtle interconnections within a body. This includes things like diet, familial and social relationships, immediate home and work environments, regional climate and geography, seasonal energies, and more. The focus of this book is on the internal body connections, but these other factors are noted for you when considering holistic health comprehensively.

These exercises can help reveal hidden areas of weakness or dysfunction. For example, if you experience pain or tension when doing a particular exercise, in a part of your body that you previously thought was functioning normally, that's very likely a sign that there's a problem there. The exercise isn't causing the pain, as almost all of them are too gentle to cause any such damage even if done incorrectly. (If any exercise has the potential to cause injury, you will be alerted to that possibility in the instructions for that exercise.) The exercise is shining a light on a preexisting problem as an early warning for something that may have gone unnoticed until the problem becomes more serious. No single body part exists in isolation from the rest of the body. In the Chinese view, neither is the body separate from the emotions and the mind.

The Western medical approach has been labeled allopathic in counterpoint to holistic, but reductionist may be a more accurate word. Allopathic is more correctly the opposite

of homeopathic, which is only one type of alternative medicine and not synonymous with holistic. Reductionist medicine looks for the one smallest thing that may be causing a disease, and then develops one treatment, either surgical or pharmacological, to remove or otherwise remedy that cause. But Western medical science is beginning to understand and apply, in its own way, some of the holistic interconnectedness that the Chinese have known and practiced for thousands of years without modern technology. For example, for many decades, blood tests requiring only a very small quantity of blood have been used to reveal much about the chemical state of entire body, and urinalysis, frequently used to screen for possible kidney disease, can also reveal many other hidden or asymptomatic diseases throughout the body, such as diabetes, ketosis, bacterial infections, jaundice, hyperthyroidism, and so on. Stress has long been recognized as the root cause of many physical diseases. Recently, the concept of bioindividuality is becoming more common in Western medicine, and as advances are made in genetic medicine, it will become the new standard. Remember, every single strand of your DNA contains the information that potentially informs and regulates the growth and repair of every cell in your entire body, and some aspects of genetic expression are known to be influenced by emotional and mental states. The whole body is interconnected, and the health of one part of the body is crucial to the health of seemingly unrelated body parts throughout the whole person. This is why, in the Exercise Prescriptions section of the appendix, you will find recommended exercises that may seem to have nothing to do with the disease or overt symptoms being addressed.

This understanding is also the basis for various holographic models of the body and for the holistic therapies that developed from that understanding. Some examples include auricular therapy, or ear acupuncture, and Korean hand acupuncture, in which points are needed in only the ear or hand respectively to treat specific regions or organs throughout the entire body. Another example is foot reflexology, in which pressure is applied to specific regions of the foot to treat corresponding body regions.

One useful way to figure out your individual maintenance needs is to take inventory of the arc of your life, identifying all the physical and emotional traumas that you've experienced; behavioral, emotional and mental habits, even ones you've cultivated; and all recurring stresses in your life, including those that may seem beyond your control. Those are some of the things that can make qi and blood stagnate, causing you to feel anything from mild, intermittent dull aches to persistent, sharp, debilitating pain. They can create other imbalances in your body, leaving you fatigued, emotionally distressed or irritated, setting the stage for impaired function of muscles and organs, and other disharmonies and pathologies. If unresolved, these are the things that accumulate and cause most of the debility of older age, the things your doctor may tell you to learn to live with, or may prescribe drugs for in order to dull your perception of them, but not resolve

the problem. Once you've identified some of those factors, you can select exercises that address them. If you are younger, doing these exercises can help prevent various accumulations before they occur. If you are older, they can help release the bound qi, improve circulation to break up blood stagnation, reverse some or all of their debilitating effects, increase energy, and improve mental outlook.

2. Promote Longevity: Put Out the Small Brush Fires First

Once you've established a health maintenance program, using these self-care exercises either alone or in combination with other practices is a big step toward creating a healthy longevity. Still, you need to pay attention to any new functional or organic health problem that may arise. It's very easy to get too attached to doing something the same way regardless of how your circumstances may change, and erroneously believe that the health regimen you've painstakingly worked out will eventually resolve the new problem too. This can be even more of a problem for someone who has invested a lot of time learning an involved practice such as taiji, and yet still may experience a lingering or new health challenge.

For example, maybe you've been enjoying good health but have a chronic mild low back problem that only acts up once in a while. Much of your self-care practice is geared toward maintaining that good health, supporting every part of yourself equally, while putting just a little more attention on healing your back. At some point you may notice that you've developed a shoulder pain, or insomnia, or a headache, or poor digestion, something else you've never had before. If it only lasts a day, or even a few days, and then disappears, it's likely nothing to be concerned about. But if it lingers more than a few days, it's a good idea to change your self-care practice to address it (as tempting as it might be to ignore it), even if it cuts into the time you'd normally spend working on healing, say, your back and the other parts of your health maintenance.

A new problem is usually relatively superficial, relatively easy to heal, and should be resolved before it becomes a pattern, something more deeply entrenched in your body. You may consider it to be just another minor nuisance, but your body will expend energy to try to heal it regardless. You have a finite amount of energy available to you at any time. A nuisance ailment will siphon off some of that energy, giving you less to use to heal your back in this example. If the nuisance persists, it can grow into something more intractable, and demand more of your body's energetic reserves. Not only will that slow the healing of your back, it will reduce the amount of energy available to power the healthy functioning of other organs, and before too long, another minor ailment will appear, demanding more energy, and further diminishing the overall functionality of your body. This is the progression of entropy, the downward spiral of declining health that accompanies and even defines aging, and it will shorten your life. If you want to live long and in good health, you have to put out the small brush fires before they can become a

forest fire that consumes everything in its path. Select the appropriate exercises to address the new problem, and practice them daily until it's gone. Always do what you can; heal the things that are easiest to heal. Once the new problem is resolved, you can go back to putting your attention on healing a chronic problem (your back in this example), and general health maintenance.

3. Restore Health: Treating or Managing Disease

If you have a preexisting condition, illness, injury, or debilitation, the first thing you need to do is address that condition and improve it to whatever degree may be possible. This is another aspect of the advice given in the preceding section, to do what you can. Many conditions can be completely resolved, almost all can be improved, and only a very few are beyond any help.

For example, you may have obvious bony changes in your hands due to advanced arthritis. The bones will probably never return to their previously normal state, but your hands can be improved nevertheless. Any associated pain can be reduced or eliminated. Within the limits of the bony restriction, you can have greatly restored functionality. That will become your new baseline "normal," and from there you can begin to rebuild some of the strength you may have lost. But you have to do the exercises you can in order to bring that about. Some may need to be modified to accommodate your restrictions, and that's fine. Over time, you may be able to add more exercises and prevent or slow degenerative changes in other parts of your body.

In recovering from a lingering or chronic illness, you may see that there are six exercises for your condition recommended in the Exercise Prescriptions, but you may only have the energy or ability to do one or two. Do those one or two. Do what you can, and in time that will help you improve enough to do more. There's no need to push yourself beyond or even to your limit. In fact, that's counterproductive to healing.

Last, maybe you only have a few minor health challenges, and your main interest is in promoting longevity. Still, you need to address those minor challenges first, and do your best to resolve them before you can truly begin the work of increasing longevity. Good health is always the foundation for long life.

4. Enhance Taiji, Qigong, and Other Healing Arts/Martial Arts Practices

In the taiji classics, it is said that the power of taiji is "rooted in the feet, issued by the legs, governed by the waist, and expressed in the fingers (hands)." This is equally true of many qigongs and most internal martial arts, and speaks to the interconnectedness of the whole body, especially while practicing taiji in this case. But in order for the body to be well connected, each individual part must be functionally "alive"—healthy and consciously accessible. Many beginning and intermediate taiji players have difficulty establishing the very foundation of the practice, that is, keeping their form "rooted in the feet." For those

people, practicing the foot self-care exercises, especially those that focus on the Bubbling Well point (which promotes grounding, an energetic connection between the earth and the person) and the ankles, which must be stable yet freely movable to allow for the opening and closing of the ankle joint, will be of great help and speed the student's progress. The feet must be supple, springy, and pliable in order to transfer the qi through them, so it may be issued by the legs.

Governance by the waist is another important foundational consideration. The Chinese word that is translated as "waist" is yao. Yao has a slightly different meaning than the Western word "waist," focusing more on the low back, the small of the back, in the region of the lumbar spine. Many people come to taiji later in life, when they may already be suffering from low back injury, chronic stiffness, and pain. While it is considered ideal to alleviate the low back distress through the qigong and taiji principles of release and let go, it can take someone many years of practice to accomplish just that. This is another instance where Chinese self-care exercises may be beneficially applied to a taiji practice, using the low back, pelvis, and hip exercises to relieve a bound up low back. The sooner the back is released, the sooner the waist can be used to effectively govern the qi within the taiji form.

Self-care exercises can also be used as part of the treatment for any injury sustained in a sparring accident, and by increasing the suppleness and functionality of each body part, can reduce the likelihood of injury in the first place.

While these few examples have focused on taiji, they provide a window into how practitioners of qigong, other martial arts, and conventional Western sports and exercise can similarly benefit from Chinese self-care exercises.

5. Care for Health Care Providers: Treating Oneself, Instructing Patients

Health care providers are exposed to more illness, emotional upset, and injury than most people. Working closely with suffering people on a daily basis can take its toll, and a health care provider can pick up some of the energetic and emotional pathologies of clients and patients as well as the more conventional germ-based pathologies. In addition, healers who use bodyworking modalities may physically stress or traumatize their own body while striving to help others.

Chinese self-care exercises can prevent most pathologies from taking hold. Paidagongs are particularly useful for breaking up and dispersing externally acquired pathogenic qi, especially when addressed in its earliest stages. Follow Your Breath Meditation can smooth and release distressing emotional qi, and help to further disperse other types of pathogenic qi. Self-care practices that support the lungs and immune system can prevent or resolve many germ-based pathologies, as well as their corresponding patterns of disharmony from a Chinese medical perspective, such as Wind-Heat or Wind-Cold Invading the Lungs, two common sources of cold and flu symptoms. Any trauma to the

health care provider's fingers, hands, wrists, arms, or back caused by a bodywork practice can be addressed by exercises directed toward those stressed or injured body parts as well as by practices addressing the health of muscles, tendons, and ligaments in general.

For patients and clients who want to take a more active role in their own health care, these exercises can be easily taught to them. The Exercise Prescription guidelines in the [Appendix](#) may be used exclusively, or they may be used as a template that the health care professional can modify as they become more familiar with each exercise and its range of benefits.

Change Your Perspective to Create the Healthiest Lifestyle

There are no guaranteed safeguards against any injury or disease, but there are many things we can do to greatly reduce the likelihood of such things. To take those steps, most people will need to have a shift in consciousness, change some aspects of their belief system, in order to better understand, accept, and implement the most effective and supportive approaches to preventive health care.

Most of us have been conditioned to give very little thought to adequate health maintenance, except for periodic checkups with our physician, until a health problem arises. Then a doctor may prescribe drugs, or, depending on the severity of the problem, more heroic measures may be required. It's only before those problems arise that we can effectively apply the maxim "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." As a case in point, consider this cautionary example. The prospect of cancer is both terrifying and tragic, and as with all disease, there is no health system that can absolutely prevent its occurrence. When Kim Allison, MD, the director of Breast Pathology at the University of Washington Medical Center in Seattle, was herself diagnosed with an aggressive form of breast cancer at age 33, she first opted for a radical mastectomy, the Western treatment of choice offering the greatest possibility of survival. In her book *Red Sunshine: A Story of Strength and Inspiration from a Doctor Who Survived Stage 3 Breast Cancer* she recounts her struggle to recover and heal. At that point, after her surgery, she elected to enlist the aid of various alternative healers, including a personal trainer who encouraged her to do yoga among other things, a nutritionist for dietary counseling, a naturopath who advised her on nutritional supplements, an acupuncturist for stress and pain management, and a shaman as a spiritual adviser. She also regularly conducted healing rituals in her back yard, with supportive family and friends. The inclusion of such healers and practices required a major shift in perspective, attitude, and lifestyle choice, especially for an MD thoroughly indoctrinated in the Western medical system.

To most Westerners, alternative practices are considered an option of last resort, when all else—that is, conventional Western medicine—fails. What makes this especially

unfortunate is that while many alternative therapies are very effective in treating existing illnesses, perhaps their greatest strength lies in their ability to prevent or reduce the occurrence and severity of any illness. The end stages of any disease are harder to cure, and sometimes impossible to cure, regardless of the health system used.

There is no way to know for sure if the alternative therapies and lifestyle modifications Dr. Allison made during her recovery may have prevented the onset of her cancer had they been adopted preventively. It is revealing that she did make those choices to facilitate her recovery, and that she is healthy now, more than four years after her diagnosis. Those were not the most convenient nor easy choices, but necessary ones. Her mindset and perspective had to shift before she could make the choices to implement the strategies she credits in part to her full recovery. This gives some indication of how far we've allowed ourselves to be misled about health—the Western medical system does not provide all the answers, nor the only viable ones—and how far we've strayed from a truly health-supporting lifestyle and mindset.

The Chinese self-care exercises contained here might not be enough on their own to fully prevent the onset of any cancer, but they are powerful adjuncts to be added to any cancer-preventing (or recovery) regimen, and part of a lifestyle that improves health in many ways. They are useful in preventing the onset of many other diseases, as well as being effective in their treatment should they occur. The prescriptive exercises in the appendix will supply guidance in selecting the exercises that may best suit your needs and concerns. Remember, you do need to make them a healthy habit—a part of your daily life—in order to enjoy the many benefits they confer.

Do not doubt the effectiveness of these exercises just because of their simplicity. Try them consistently for a month and see what happens!

[contents]

One

Foot, Seated: Series One

There are many individual benefits to all the exercises that follow in this chapter, described as each exercise is presented. Two Chinese proverbs apply to all of them, though, which you may want to consider even if you have no apparent foot problems. The first is, "Death begins in the feet." While there are a few ways to interpret that proverb, the simplest is that the feet are the foundations for our entire body. We stand on them for most of our waking day, they support us, transport us from place to place, allowing us to work, play, and accomplish most of the necessary activities of daily life. Yet most of us take them entirely for granted. Just as the foundation of a house must be stable and secure in order for it to support everything else that is built upon it, so must our feet be stable and healthy to ensure the stability and healthy functionality of our legs, knees, back, neck, and literally every other part of our body. If your feet are troubled, it's only a matter of time before you will develop aches and pains in other parts of your body. If you doubt that, just ask anyone whose work requires them to stand on their feet all day, or anyone with gout or arthritis. Even the pain of a stubbed toe or an ingrown toenail can make a person feel less functional and devitalized. It is that decreased functionality and reduced vitality that sets the stage for declining health overall.

The second proverb is, "A wise person breathes through their feet." This one may be a little more difficult for a Westerner, or for anyone without sufficient training in Asian health practices such as qigong or taiji, to fully understand and appreciate. Keeping things as simple and relatable as possible, we can define breathing in this case to be taking in qi, or vital life energy, from the ground, the earth, drawing it up through our feet. Whether you are already adept at qigong, or follow the simplified Western practice called "earthing" (standing barefoot on the ground to absorb some of the earth's ionic energy—similar to "grounding," making energetic contact with and being stabilized by the earth) as is taught in chapter [Eleven](#), your feet and legs must be open in order to absorb whatever amount of qi you are able to gather. Each of the following exercises assists in removing any physical restriction that may be present in your feet and ankles, opens them energetically to permit an unimpeded flow of qi, and stimulates qi to move freely through those body parts.

1. Toe Pinch, Stretch, and Twist

Purpose

Physical: This is a preparatory practice, to gently open the toes before proceeding to the next series of exercises for the toes and feet.

Energetic: It stimulates the Jing Well points of the acupuncture meridians that end at the toes, including the Liver, Gall Bladder, Spleen, Stomach, and Urinary Bladder. The Jing Well points have an invigorating effect on the mind, and so this practice may help to improve your focus throughout the course of your practice session, into the rest of the day.

Techniques Used

Acupressure (to the Jing Well points); mobilization of the toe joints; gentle stretch of the ligaments.

Method

Sitting comfortably in a chair or on the floor, cross your right leg over your left. Grab the tip of your right big toe with your left thumb and index finger, close to the bottom of the toenail. Apply firm pressure with your fingers. Gently pull your toe straight out from your foot, so that the joints of the toe are straightened without strain, and feel comfortably open. Keeping that traction on your toe, twist it one way to the point at which you feel some resistance (**Fig 1.1**), and then twist it in the other direction to the point of resistance. Twist your toe back and forth in this way at least ten times. Then repeat this procedure on each of your four other toes. Then do the same thing on your left foot. Alternatively, you can do all of the seated foot exercises on one foot, and then do the same on the other foot.

Additional Considerations

You may feel slight pain or discomfort from your finger pressure on some of your toes, which indicates an obstruction of Qi, Blood, or both. Gout (uric acid crystal deposits) indicates another type of obstruction, and may produce a more sharp pain. Some toes may not feel any such sensation. The sensation of discomfort is nothing to be alarmed by, although the underlying cause is something you want to address. In this exercise, simply work the uncomfortable toes just a little longer than the ones that are fine.

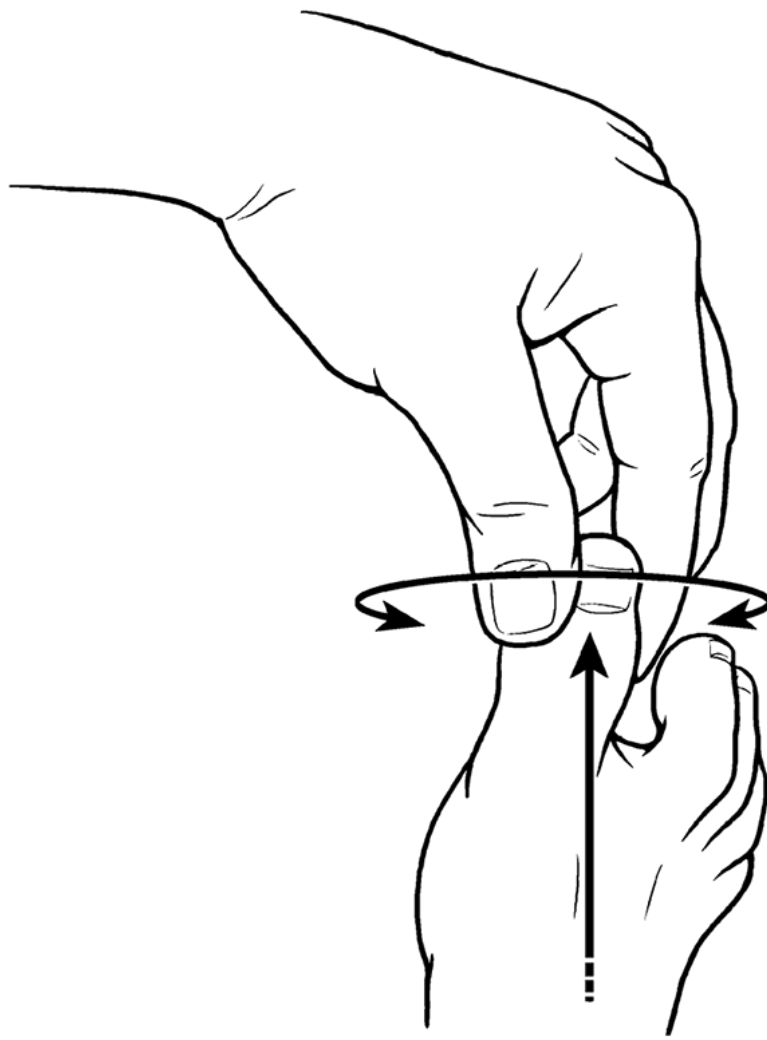


Figure 1.1 (Toe Pinch, Stretch, and Twist)

If you have arthritis in your toes, you may feel an ache from this practice. Do not overdo something even as simple and gentle as this exercise, but neither should you avoid it altogether because of that ache. The traction on the toes opens the joint space, so you will be doing no harm to yourself by twisting your toes with the joints opened in that way, and in fact your toes will feel much better at the end of your practice session. Additionally, the Ying Spring acupuncture points that are present near where the toes join the foot, some of those being at the web between the toes, are useful in clearing heat. One of the Western correlations to clearing heat means reducing inflammation, so your toes will benefit from that energetic effect. The Ying Spring points are addressed more strongly in some of the exercises that follow, but this is a good place to start that process.

These considerations are applicable to the rest of the toe exercises that follow.

2. Toe Stretch, Forward and Backward

Purpose

Physical: Stretch the muscles, tendons, and ligaments in each toe; open the joint spaces between the small bones of the toes. Most people have their feet in shoes all day, which tend to compress the toes, allowing the muscles, tendons, and ligaments to tighten

and shorten. Our feet are the foundations for our entire body, so keeping them open and supple will provide better support for and comfort throughout our body.

Energetic: Every practice that stretches a muscle benefits the Spleen, since the Spleen dominates (has a special affinity for) the muscles. Every practice that mobilizes tendons and ligaments benefits the Liver, which dominates the sinews (tendons and ligaments). The Liver and Spleen acupuncture meridians begin at the big toe, so there is an additional benefit provided when engaging that toe. The Jing Well and Ying Spring points introduced in Exercise 1 are further stimulated in this exercise.

Techniques Used

Mobilization of the toe joints; gentle stretch of the tendons, ligaments, and muscles.

Method

Sitting comfortably in a chair or on the floor, cross your right leg over your left. If your legs and hips are flexible enough, place your right outer ankle on your left thigh anywhere that's comfortable between your knee and hip, with the sole of your foot facing left and slightly upward. This allows the easiest access to your toes. Grasp your big toe firmly with your left hand, and the next toe with your right. With a slightly stronger traction than in the first exercise, pull your toes straight out from your foot so that the joint spaces feel open and the toes are lengthened. This also opens the metatarsal bones, the small bones in your feet closest to your toes, and stretches their associated tendons and ligaments. Maintaining that traction, move your big toe backward, toward the top of your foot, and the next toe forward, toward the sole of your foot, until you meet resistance in both directions (**Fig 1.2**). Then reverse directions and repeat, moving your toes forward and back at least ten times. Then grasp the toe next to your big toe with your left hand, and the middle toe with your right. Repeat the entire procedure with those toes. Continue through the rest of the toes in the same way. The middle three toes will get twice the workout as the big and little toes, so you can end this practice by grasping the big toe with the left hand and the little toe with the right, apply the traction to each and move them forward and backward another ten times.



Figure 1.2 (Toe Stretch, Forward and Backward)

3. Toe Stretch, Side to Side

Purpose and Techniques

These are the same as for Exercise 2.

Method

Sitting comfortably in a chair or on the floor, cross your right leg over your left as in Exercise 2. Grasp your big toe firmly with your left hand, and the next toe with your right. With a slightly stronger traction than in the first exercise, pull your toes straight out from your foot so that the joint spaces feel open and the toes are lengthened. Maintaining that traction, spread your toes sideways as far apart as is comfortable, until you meet resistance (**Fig 1.3**). Then bring them back together, touching briefly. Spread and return to touching at least ten times. Then grasp your second toe with your left hand and your middle toe with your right. Repeat the entire procedure with those toes. Continue through the rest of the toes in the same way.



Figure 1.3 (Toe Stretch, Side to Side)

4. Rotational Toe Stretch

Purpose

Physical: More strongly stretches the muscles, tendons, and ligaments in each toe where they join the foot; open the joint spaces between the toes and the metatarsal bones at the end of the foot. Mobilizes the metatarsal bones and opens the associated joint spaces.

Energetic: Strongly stimulates most of the Ying Spring points of the foot, and moderately stimulates the Shu Stream points. Benefits the Liver and Spleen through their association with tendons, ligaments, and muscles. The Kidneys are also benefited both from the more vigorous joint mobilization, as the Kidneys dominate the bones, and from the Laogong acupuncture point at the center of the palm gently stimulating the Bubbling Well (Yongquan) point, the first point on the Kidney meridian near the ball of the foot. This is a partial Daoyin technique. Daoyin means “guide and induce,” referring to qi flow. Without some training of the mind, the “guiding” aspect may not be accomplished here, but the “induction” occurs almost automatically, from the contact between Laogong and Yongquan with the associated physical tissue manipulation.

Techniques Used

Mobilization of the toe-to-foot joints; gentle stretch of the tendons, ligaments, and muscles; daoyin.

Method

Sitting comfortably in a chair or on the floor, cross your right leg over your left as in Exercises 2 and 3. With your right hand, grasp your foot so that your thumb is perpendicular to the sole of your foot, about two inches below the ball of your foot. Your index finger should cross perpendicular to the top of your foot, with your little finger near where your foot joins the front of your leg. Bring the palm of your left hand to the sole of your right foot, and interlock your left fingers between your right toes (**Fig 1.4**). Ideally, the web of your fingers should touch the web of your toes.



Figure 1.4 (Rotational Toe Stretch)

Your right hand holds your foot immobile, so that from your mid foot up to your ankle and lower leg, nothing moves. The palm of your left hand maintains contact with the sole of your foot as much as possible, to stimulate the Bubbling Well point. With your left hand, gently pull all of your toes straight out from your foot to create the traction used in Exercises 2 and 3. The traction is useful and beneficial, but secondary to what comes next, so if you lose it, don't be too concerned. Do your best to maintain that traction, and rotate your toes in clockwise circles at least ten times. Then reverse direction, rotating your toes in counterclockwise circles.

Do not remove your fingers at the end of this exercise. The next exercise begins in the same position.

Additional Considerations: Modifying This Exercise

Exercises 2 and 3 served to open your toes to facilitate interlocking your fingers between them. You may find that your toes are still too tight to allow such a full interlocking, and if so, you can modify the exercise in this way. You may only be able to get the tips of your fingers between your toes (**Fig 1.5**), or you may be able to get the first or even the second finger joint part way between your toes. However far you can get your fingers, that's okay for now. With practice and time, your feet will open more. Make whatever accommodations you may need to approximate the rest of the instructions until you can fully interlock your fingers and toes.



Figure 1.5 (Rotational Toe Stretch)

5. Rotational Foot and Ankle Stretch

Purposes and Techniques

These are the same as for Exercise 4, with these additions. Physically, it strongly stretches the muscles, tendons, and ligaments of the ankle; opens the ankle joint space. Mobilizes the metatarsal bones and opens the associated joint spaces. Energetically, it strongly stimulates most of the Shu Stream points of the foot, mostly found at various places along the general circumference of the foot up from the web of the toes, toward the ankle. Stream points are most commonly used to treat Bi (pronounced "be") Syndromes, more colloquially called Painful Obstruction Syndromes, and which are often the same as or associated with various types of arthritis pain. This is especially true if Damp is part of the pathogenic picture, which is almost always the case in Bi Syndromes. That Damp may or may not visibly manifest as swelling or edema. (Damp, along with Dryness, Wind, Cold, and Heat, are both external, environmental, pathogenic influences and internally generated ones when organ systems are not functioning properly.) The reader who may be unfamiliar yet interested in this and other Chinese medical terms used in this book is directed to *The Web That Has No Weaver* by Ted Kaptchuk, for further insight. While such insight is useful and encouraged, it is not necessary in order for you to get the most from the exercises taught here.) The Kidney Shu Stream point, Kidney 3, is located just behind the inner ankle. Because of its association with bones and hence joints, that's a particularly important point used to treat most Bi Syndromes. This exercise also provides moderate to strong stimulation to the foot Jing River points, which are located at various points around and above the ankle.

Method

Beginning where you left off in Exercises 4, grasp your lower left leg with your right

hand, just above your ankle. Your right hand holds your leg immobile, so that above your ankle, nothing moves.

Keep the palm of your left hand at the sole of your right foot with your left fingers interlocked between your right toes. Ideally, the web of your fingers should touch the web of your toes.

The palm of your left hand maintains contact with the sole of your foot as much as possible, to stimulate the Bubbling Well point. With your left hand, gently pull all of your toes straight out from your foot to create the traction used in Exercises 2, 3, and 4. As in Exercise 4, the traction is useful and beneficial, but secondary to what comes next, so if you lose it, don't be too concerned. Do your best to maintain that traction, and rotate your entire foot from your ankle in clockwise circles at least ten times (**Fig 1.6A** and **Fig 1.6B** on next page). Then reverse direction, rotating your foot and ankle in counterclockwise circles an equal number of times. When you finish, hold your foot still, slightly grip your toes with your interlocked fingers, and pull your fingers straight out beyond the tips of your toes. This gives your toes one last stretch, and may spread them just slightly farther than previously. If you have dislodged any stagnant qi, this pull will help remove it from your foot and toes.

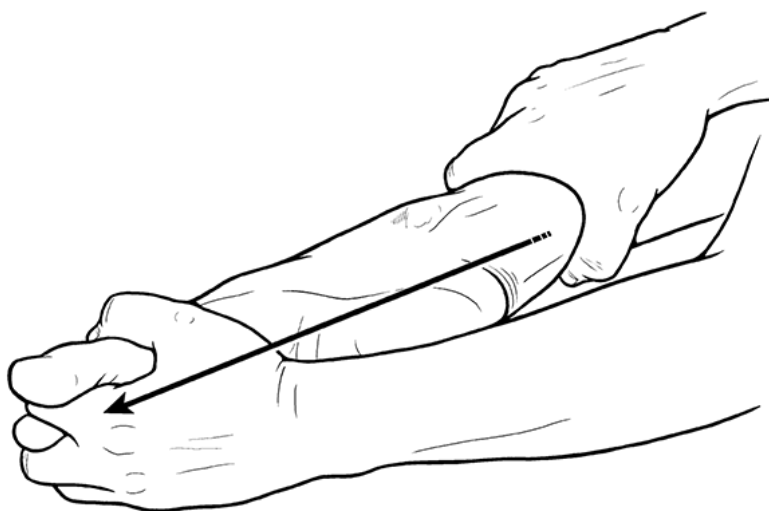


Figure 1.6A (Rotational Foot and Ankle Stretch)

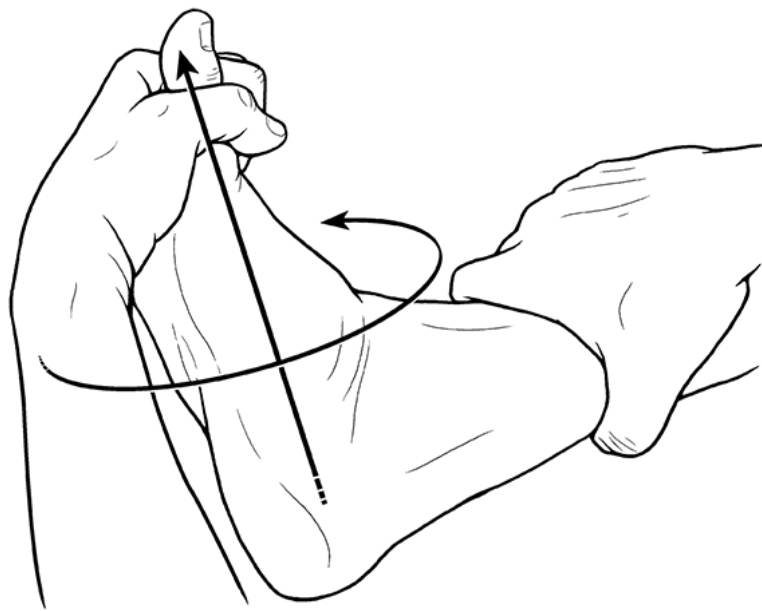


Figure 1.6B (Rotational Foot and Ankle Stretch)

Although your entire foot will move, you'll feel the rotation most strongly in your ankle. You may feel or even hear clicks and pops. As long as there is no pain, that's fine, and even expected if you haven't moved your ankle like this before. If your ankles are typically somewhat painful, feeling that much pain is also okay, you just want to be careful to not make the pain increase beyond that. Over time (many days or weeks of practice), both the pain and the pops and clicks will improve.

Foot, Seated: Series Two

1. Foot Wringing, Upward

Purpose

Physical: Opens the joint spaces between all the bones of the foot; further opens the ankle; provides a spiraling or shearing stretch through the muscles, tendons, and ligaments of the foot.

Energetic: By opening the physical spaces in the foot, all of the energetic pathways are freed, allowing for unrestricted qi flow. In addition to deepening the benefits already stated for all the foot exercises, this begins the process of grounding, providing greater stability and a sense of connection with and support from the earth.

Techniques Used

Stretching; joint mobilization. Some acupressure to Kidney 1, the Bubbling Well Point, may occur, but that is not a main focus of this exercise.

Method

Sitting either on the floor or in a chair as in the previous exercises, cross your right leg over your left knee. Interlock your fingers, and place them palm side down across the top of your right foot. Your right thumb will then be in a position to cross just under the ball of your foot, so that the tip of your thumb rests on or near Kidney 1, Yongquan (the

Bubbling Well Point). Your left thumb should cross over your right, so you are securely grasping your foot. Firmly twist your foot, so that the sole surface faces upward, toward the sky (**Fig 1.7** on next page). Your heel will not move very much, as the bones are denser there and don't allow much movement. That's normal. While maintaining the twist, your right thumb pushes the ball of your foot outward, toward the tip of your big toe. Simultaneously, your left hand pulls the little toe side of your foot toward your heel. This creates the shearing, spiraling aspect of the stretch, and opens your foot and ankle more fully than just a circular stretch would. Here, your outer ankle is stretched more.

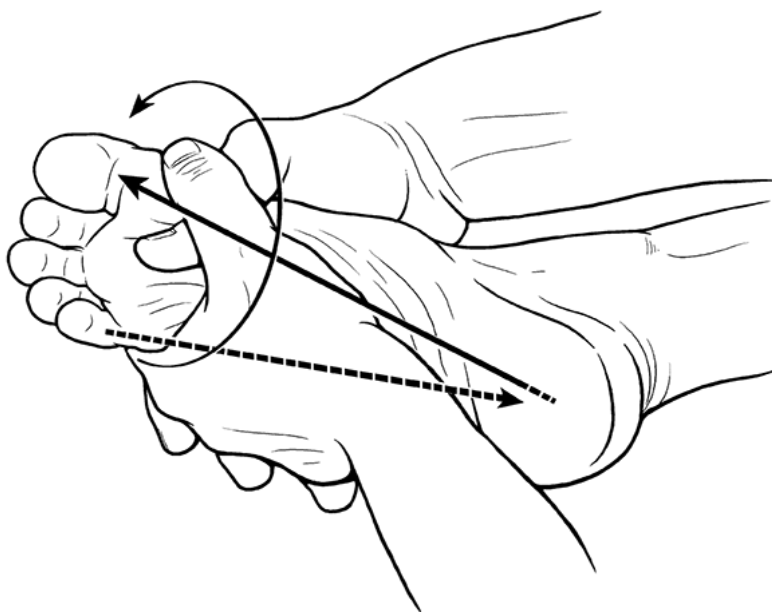


Figure 1.7 (Foot Wringing, Upward)

Hold this stretch for 20–30 seconds. Repeat once more, or twice if your foot and ankle feel the need. With some practice, you can safely maintain this stretch for two minutes. When performing a two-minute stretch, just do one so that you don't overstretch your ligaments.

2. Foot Wringing, Downward

Purposes and Techniques

These are the same as for Exercise 1.

Method

Seated, with your right leg crossed over your left, keep your fingers interlocked but place them with the palm surface to the sole of your foot. Your left thumb tip will be placed at or near the margin of the web between your big toe and the one next to it. Your hand position will be slightly closer to your toes than in the previous exercise. Firmly twist your foot, so that the sole surface faces downward, toward the ground (**Fig 1.8**). Your heel will not move very much, as previously, and your entire foot will normally have less range of motion in this downward direction than in the upward one. While maintaining the twist, your left thumb pushes your big toe outward, toward its tip.

Simultaneously, your right hand pulls the little toe side of your foot toward your heel. Here, your inner ankle is stretched more.

Hold this stretch for twenty to thirty seconds. Repeat once more, or twice if your foot and ankle feel the need. In this direction, there is no need to extend the length of the stretch longer, since there is a natural bony limit that prevents further benefit with a longer stretch.

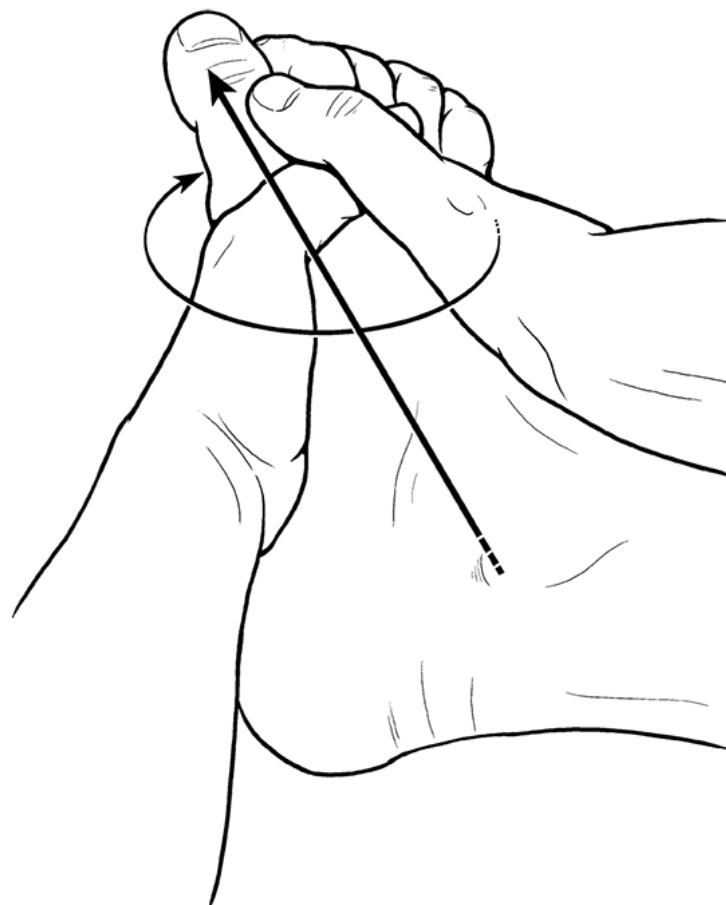


Figure 1.8 (Foot Wringing, Downward)

3. Centerline of Sole Massage

Purpose

Physical: Relaxes and releases the plantar fascia (the tough membrane covering the bottom surface of the foot, below the skin), and the related muscles. Helps to relieve plantar fasciitis.

Energetic: Awakens the Central Channel, one of the core energy channels that runs directly through the center of the body. Since the Central Channel is formed almost at the moment of conception, advanced Central Channel work addresses constitutional, genetic, and karmic considerations. "Awakening" is a gentle approach, a very mild stimulation that helps a person become more sensitive to the qi in any targeted body location.

Techniques Used

Acupressure; reflexology. There are many models used in reflexology, most being accessed on the hands and ears as well as the feet. In one common model of foot

reflexology, many of the internal organs are accessed along the centerline of the foot. While those organs will benefit from this massage, here we are using the model of the centerline of the foot as a hologram for the centerline of the body.

Method

Seated as before with right leg crossed over left knee, grasp the foot with both hands so that the fingers are on the top surface of the foot, and the thumbs touch on the Bubbling Well point, on the centerline of the sole just below the ball of the foot. With moderate pressure, make very small circles with both thumbs working together in the same direction. The nail surface of the thumbs should be touching, or nearly so. There is no set number of circles, but stay in one location long enough for you to feel the sole relaxing at that point. Then move both thumbs together toward the heel, about the distance of a thumb's width, to the next lowest point on the centerline of the sole. Repeat the circular motion in that location. Continue in this way until just before reaching the center of the heel (**Fig 1.9**).



Figure 1.9 (Centerline of Sole Massage)

You will probably find spots that are sore or achy as you massage your foot. This is nothing to be alarmed by, but it does mean there is some restriction, a physical or energetic obstruction, tension, or irritation in the plantar fascia or muscles, or some toxic accumulation. You may want to spend a little more time applying circular pressure in those locations; many teachers claim that counterclockwise circles are best for dispersing such things, but I encourage you to experiment and see what feels best to you. Don't expect or try to clear that out in just one or two sessions, but after a few days or a few

weeks of self-treatment, you will find that those points are no longer uncomfortable.

4. Centerline Fold and Spread

Purpose

Physical: Flexes and stretches the sole of your foot to further relax and release the plantar fascia and related muscles; mobilizes the bones of the foot, helping to open the small joint spaces there.

Energetic: Further opens the Central Channel and prepares the foot for the deeper energetic stimulation of the next exercise.

Techniques Used

Stretching; joint mobilization.

Method

Seated as before with right leg crossed over left knee, grasp your right foot with both hands, fingers interlocked over the top of the foot. With the heel of both hands (near where the base of the thumb, the thenar eminence, joins the wrist) squeeze the sides of the foot, from closer to the toe end of the foot, toward the centerline of the sole (**Fig 1.10**). This spreads the top of the foot, and gathers both physical tissue and qi along the centerline of the sole. Hold this compression for just a few seconds, and then slide your hands toward your ankle so that they are positioned closer to the middle of your foot, and repeat. Finally, move your hands even closer to your ankle, and repeat once more. In this position, you will not get much stretch at the top of your foot, but you will still get an effective gathering at the sole.



Figure 1.10 (Centerline Fold and Spread)

Next, move your hands toward your toes once more. Unlock your fingers, and place the tips of your fingers on the top surface of your foot at the midline, with the nail surface of your fingers touching each other, or nearly so. The whole length of your thumbs should be touching the sole of your foot, thumbs touching each other, with thumb tips near the middle of your toes. Using your fingertips mainly to anchor your hands in place and to provide some resistance for your thumbs, apply moderate pressure with your thumbs and spread them out toward the sides of your foot (**Fig 1.11** on next page). This stretches the sole of your foot and slightly compresses the top of your foot. Do your best to keep the spreads slow, smooth, and even. The top of your foot will not visibly compress as much as the sole did because of natural bony restrictions. Return your thumbs to the midline of the sole, and repeat the spreads two more times, for a total of three. Then move your hands toward your ankle, to the middle of your foot, and repeat the three spreads in that location. Finally, move your hands closest to your ankles, and do three final spreads.



Figure 1.11 (Centerline Fold and Spread)

5. Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan (Bubbling Well)

Purpose

Physical: Warms and brings blood to the bottom of the foot, softens and opens the tissues.

Energetic: Stimulates qi flow, brings qi to K1, the Bubbling Well point. Physically and energetically prepares the foot for the next exercise.

Techniques Used

Friction massage, qi stimulation, induction, and sensitization.

Method

Seated as before with right leg crossed over left knee, with the right palm on the top surface of the right toes, grasp the right toes, wrapping your thumb around your big toe. Gently bend the toes back to stretch the sole of the foot. Place the palm of your left hand on the sole of your foot, so that the Laogong point at the center of the palm is roughly over the Bubbling Well point (**Fig 1.12**). Quickly and vigorously rub your palm back and forth over the sole of your foot. The movement does not need to be a large one. Try to make your Laogong point cross the Bubbling Well point with each back and forth motion. Do this one hundred times unless your hand tires before then. It will only take about a half a minute if you move your hand fast enough.

A variation, especially useful if you suffer from cold hands and feet, is to rub the palms of your hands together first, to warm them and bring more qi to them before rubbing the sole of your foot. Rubbing your hands together in this way is a common method to bring qi to your hands and sensitize Laogong, often done before beginning a variety of energy

practices.



**Figure 1.12 (Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan—
Bubbling Well)**

6. Pumping the Bubbling Well Point

Purpose

Physical: Locally, of minimal importance. If there is a physical restriction at the ball of your foot, common in many people, this will reduce it. If you feel some tenderness at the point where you are applying pressure, that's an indicator that you're on the right spot.

Energetic: This point has a variety of functions, so its energetic purposes are fairly extensive. It is the main point to stimulate the rising of qi, and as such it is called a "revival point," used to awaken the mind from fainting or unconsciousness, or to focus and ease when a person has had a shocking, destabilizing experience. Even in less serious circumstances, it will stimulate the mind and provide a natural energizing effect. This is one aspect of its being the first point of the Kidney meridian, which ends within the brain. In what might seem paradoxical, it also exerts a strong calming effect on the mind, useful for reducing anxiety.

For people who practice qigong, martial arts, or other physical disciplines that have an inherent energetic nature, the more open this point becomes, the easier it is to connect with the earth to ground and draw the earth's energy upward. If you practice any of those arts and have some difficulty in grounding or perceiving qi flows up your legs, practice this for a few weeks and you'll feel the improvement. While all the foot exercises may be of some help, this one provides a particularly strong benefit in that regard. The traditional

functions of this point are mainly focused on its mental and emotional benefits, but it will strengthen all the functions associated with the kidneys, and by extension the urinary bladder, which is the Yang organ paired with the kidneys. Some of these include normalizing urination, improving sexual vitality and/or desire, reducing back pain, and strengthening the bones. Those will become more pronounced when adding other exercises and practices that benefit the kidneys.

Technique Used

Acupressure





Figure 1.13A and 1.13B (Pumping the Bubbling Well Point)

Method

Seated as before with right leg crossed over left knee, place the tip of your right thumb directly on the Bubbling Well point. Maintaining contact with the Bubbling Well point, position your thumb so the thumb tip is perpendicular to the Bubbling Well point (**Fig 1.13A**), and the first joint is bent at about 90 degrees. Gently grasp your right foot, the palm and fingers of your right hand on the top surface of your foot, down from your toes and as close to your ankle as is comfortable.

Place your left hand so that the Laogong point contacts the bent joint of your right thumb. Your left thumb points upward and contacts your toes while the fingers of your left hand curl around your upper foot by the margin of your toes, above the fingers of your right hand (**Fig 1.13B**). By squeezing your left hand, your left palm will push the tip of your right thumb directly into the Bubbling Well point with more force than you could easily manage with your right thumb alone. Using a pressure that is strong yet comfortable, squeeze your left hand and then release the squeeze rapidly, so that there is a pumping sensation at the Bubbling Well point. Repeat this up to a hundred times, rapidly enough that it would take you no more than a minute.

Ankle Exercises, Seated, Active

The previous exercises have all been passive; that is, you've used your hands to exert an effect on your feet, which have been the passive recipients of the work your hands have done. The next three exercises involve actively using the muscles in your feet and lower legs to mobilize your ankle joints. Regardless of the particular benefits of each exercise,

these have the added advantage of drawing more blood into your feet, ankles, and lower legs. Blood always brings nutrition, oxygen, and qi in, and helps remove local toxic accumulations should any be present. It also helps lubricate the joints and muscles. That can help to relax those joints and muscles which may be stiff and achy from relative inactivity, effectively “dried out” from reduced blood flow. Conversely, in other people inactivity will make the blood and other body fluids pool, creating a swelling. The activity of these exercises will help pump out the pooled fluids, and over time will strengthen the muscles so whatever your foot and ankle concerns may be, they will improve and have a reduced likelihood of returning. While the passive exercises may bring some awareness into the body part being worked, the active exercises will deepen your relationship with that part of your body and give you more control over its functions. As a final benefit, many people find these helpful in promoting sleep when practiced just before bed. That’s because many types of poor sleep, restlessness, or insomnia are due to too much activity in the mind. Whenever there is activity, there is qi, and too much of that in the brain creates too much thought and mental agitation. The active aspect of these exercises brings the blood down to the feet, and it is the qi that moves and directs the blood, so qi is brought down out of the head. In cases where that is the cause of sleep disturbances, these exercises will remedy the problem.

In each of these ankle exercises, a technique used is a simple daoyin, “guiding and inducing.” They induce the blood to move, and guide it downward toward the feet. Since qi is “the commander of the Blood,” qi is also induced and guided downward, as described in the preceding paragraph.

These exercises are best practiced sitting on the floor, legs extended in front of you, and I will describe them that way. If your legs or back are too inflexible or painful to allow this, you can easily modify these by performing them while sitting in a chair, legs extended as far as is comfortable. Follow all the other instructions as closely as possible.

1. Ankle Flexion and Extension

Purpose

Physical: Provides linear flexibility in the ankles, improving flexion and extension in the ankles and toes; strengthens and opens the ankle joint and toes; stretches and releases the plantar fascia, the tough membrane covering the sole of the foot.

Energetic: Stimulates the foot Ying Spring points, found where the toes connect to the foot, and the foot Shu Stream points, found at various places along the circumference of the foot and ankle. Ying Spring points are useful in clearing heat. One of the Western correlations to clearing heat means reducing inflammation, so your toes, as well as other parts of your body along the selected meridian pathways, will benefit from that energetic effect. As discussed earlier, Stream points are most commonly used to treat Bi (pronounced “be”) syndromes, more colloquially called Painful Obstruction syndromes,

which are often the same as or associated with various types of arthritis pain. This is especially true if Damp is part of the pathogenic picture, which is almost always the case with Bi syndromes. If Damp is present as swelling or edema, the active motion of the ankle in this exercise is very useful in reducing that swelling, from both physical and energetic standpoints.

Techniques Used

Active stretching, flexion, and extension.

Method

Sitting on the floor with legs extended in front of you, feet six to twelve inches apart, slightly bend your knees, and then “anchor” your heels to that spot on the floor. That is, don’t let your heels slide on the floor at all as you move the rest of your foot as directed in each of these exercises. If you keep your heels contacting the floor in one spot only, you’ll ensure the fullest possible range of motion when you begin to move your feet. This becomes very easy with a little practice.

Begin with both ankles flexed (dorsiflexed) and toes fully extended, pointing toward your head (**Fig 1.14A**). Keeping your toes extended, push the soles of your feet downward (forward), pivoting on your heels, which remain anchored in place (**Fig 1.14B**). Near the end of your downward push, flex your toes tightly as though you are grabbing something with them (**Fig 1.14C**). With your ankles fully extended (plantar flexed) and toes flexed, the sole of your foot should feel “scrunched,” slightly compressed as though it too is attempting to grab something. Keep your toes tightly flexed and pull your foot back by flexing your ankle, still keeping your heel anchored to one spot (**Fig 1.14D**). The sole of your foot may feel even more compressed as you do this. As you reach the end of the ankle flexion, open your toes and extend them, once again pointing them toward your head. This brings you to your starting position (**Fig 1.14A**). Repeat this ankle flexion and extension 25 times, more if your ankles and feet are healthy.

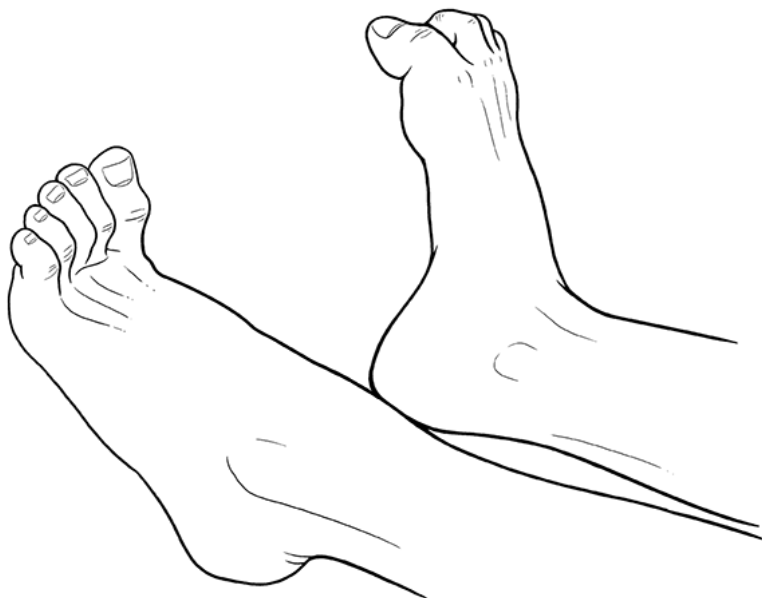




Figures 1.14A and 1.14B (Ankle Flexion and Extension)



Figures 1.14C and 1.14D (Ankle Flexion and Extension)



Variation

Instead of moving your feet forward/backward and downward/upward together, you can alternate them in a sort of bicycling motion, so that one foot moves downward and grabs with the toes while the other is moving upward and extending the toes (**Fig 1.15** on previous page). Note, this image shows the toes immediately before they reach their final position as described, at which time the feet bicycle in the opposite directions. The basic physical and energetic benefits are the same, but this variation requires more coordination, benefits the nervous system, and helps to improve mental presence and focus. The alternating up and down foot movement is a simple version of what is called "cross crawl" technique, used in learning disabilities, dyslexia, poor coordination and body awareness, and in compromised cognitive processes primarily involving left and right brain hemisphere communication.

2. Ankle Pronation and Supination (Inward and Outward Foot Roll)

Purpose

Physical: Strengthens and opens the ankle on another plane of motion. While pronation and supination may be considered problematic and even pathological if occurring randomly or uncontrollably when walking or running, the ability to pronate and supinate freely while having the stability to keep your foot properly aligned will promote a supple support to your entire upper body whenever you are on your feet, during any activity.

Energetic: Stimulates the foot Jing River points, found at various places along and above the circumference of the ankle. Because this exercise involves pivoting around the centerline of the sole of your foot, it has the ability to stimulate qi flow through your Central Channel, a core constitutional pathway running through the center of your entire body. While of some benefit, that effect will not be particularly strong from this exercise alone. If you are following the exercises in order and have already done the Centerline of Sole Massage and Centerline Fold and Spread, you will have awakened your Central Channel, allowing more qi to flow there with the addition of the mental focus used in this practice.

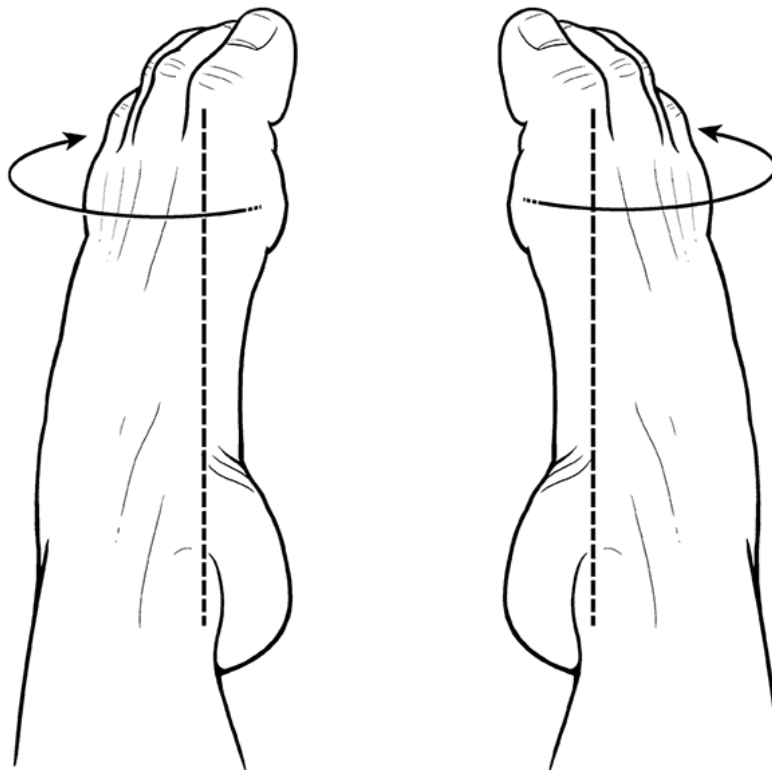
Techniques Used

Active stretching, pronation, and supination.

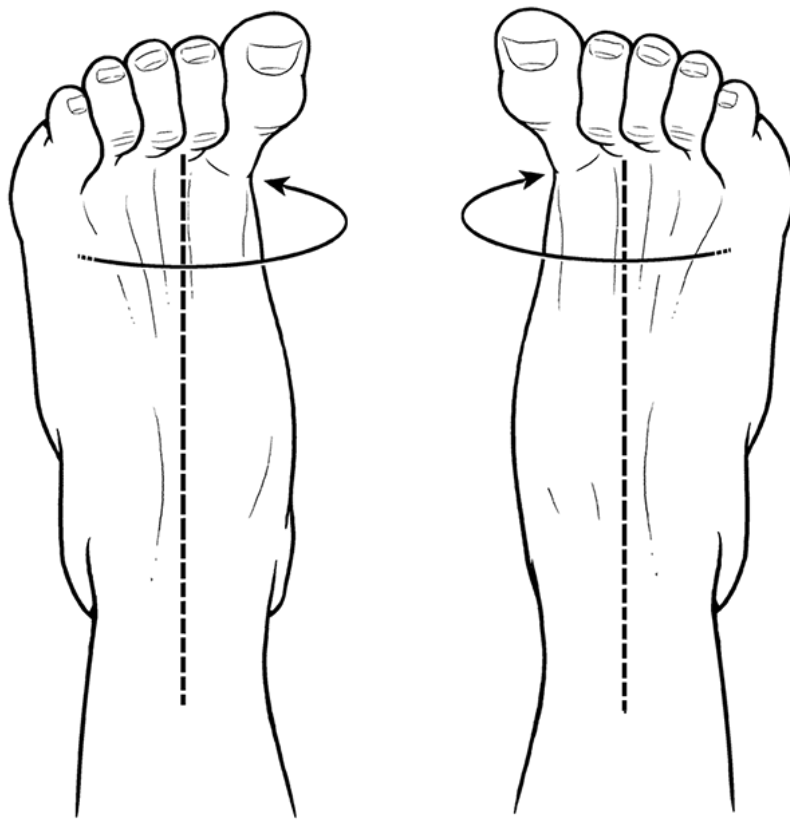
Method

Sitting on the floor with legs extended in front of you as before, feet 6 to 12 inches apart, slightly bend your knees, and then anchor your heels to that spot on the floor, as in the previous exercise. Keep your feet as close to perpendicular to the floor as possible. With your mind only, feel the centerline of the sole of your foot. If it helps, you can

Imagine a pole running through the center of your foot, from your middle toe straight through to where your heel contacts the floor. Simultaneously rotate both feet around that centerline, moving your soles to face each other (**Fig 1.16A**). You will not be able to get your soles to actually fully face each other if you keep your legs straight and your feet perpendicular to the floor. That's normal. You only need to move your feet in that direction. In the language of Western anatomy, this is called supination. While you are moving in that direction, flex your toes, which will slightly increase the arch in your foot, creating a feeling of compression there.



**Figure 1.16A (Ankle Pronation and Supination—
Inward and Outward Foot Roll)**



**Figure 1.16B (Ankle Pronation and Supination—
Inward and Outward Foot Roll)**

Then simultaneously move your feet in the opposite direction, so that the soles of your feet face away from each other. This is pronation. While moving your feet in that direction, extend your toes, which will slightly flatten the arch in your foot, and create a feeling of stretch there (**Fig 1.16B**).

As in the other exercises in this set, while primarily targeting your ankles, actively using your toes will help to engage the entire foot. You may find your feet getting tired after just a few repetitions. Ten or fifteen turns of your foot in each direction is a good place to start, but you should try to get comfortable with twenty-five to thirty. It's fine to do more than that if your feet and ankles don't get fatigued, but there's no need to do more than fifty, as the amount of additional benefit you'll get beyond that is minimal.

3. Ankle Rotations

Purpose

Physical: Provides rotational flexibility in the ankles; strengthens and opens the ankle joint.

Energetic: Moderately stimulates most of the Shu Stream points of the foot, mostly found at various places along the general circumference of the foot up from the web of the toes toward the ankle. Stream points are most commonly used to treat Bi (Painful Obstruction) Syndromes, which are often the same as or associated with various types of arthritis pain. This is especially true if Damp is part of the pathogenic picture. That Damp may or may not visibly manifest as swelling or edema. The Kidney Shu Stream point, Kidney 3, is located just behind the inner ankle, and is strongly stimulated in this series of

ankle exercises. Because of its association with bones and hence joints, that's a particularly important point used to treat most Bi Syndromes. All these ankle exercises provide strong stimulation to the foot Jing River points which are located at various points around and above the ankle. As a class of points, Jing River points are typically used to treat all types of respiratory problems. Among the Foot Jing River points, those on the stomach and spleen meridians are most beneficial for those types of conditions, although all tend to clear Wind and Heat, external pathogens which commonly invade the lungs.

Technique Used

Active stretching.

Method

Sitting on the floor with legs extended in front of you, feet six to twelve inches apart, slightly bend your knees, and then "anchor" your heels to that spot on the floor, as in the previous exercise. In other words, don't let your heels slide on the floor at all as you move the rest of your foot as directed in each of these exercises. If you keep your heels contacting the floor in one spot only, you'll ensure the fullest possible range of motion when you begin to move your feet. This can be a little challenging at first, but becomes very easy with a little practice.

Point the toes of both feet directly downward, away from your head, primarily by extending your ankles (also called plantar flexion) (**Fig 1.17A** on next page). Your toes may flex some in this position too, but not too tightly. While primarily targeting your ankles, actively using your toes in these exercises, to point to each of the clock directions, will help to engage the entire foot. The line from the tips of your toes, across the top of your foot, through to your lower leg should be as straight as possible in this starting position, at the 12 o'clock position. Then rotate both feet clockwise from your ankles, remembering to keep your heels anchored in one spot on the floor. As your feet move to 3 o'clock, begin to pull your toes back from their flexed state (**Fig 1.17B**). As your feet move to 6 o'clock, your ankles are fully flexed (also called dorsiflexion) and your toes are fully extended upward, toward your head (**Fig 1.17C**). Continuing to circle to 9 o'clock, begin to flex your toes (**Fig 1.17D**). As you complete one ankle rotation, you return to your starting position, ankle fully extended and toes pointing downward.



Figures 1.17A and 1.17B (Ankle Rotations)



Figures 1.17C and 1.17D (Ankle Rotations)

If your ankles are healthy, do twenty-five or more ankle rotations clockwise, and then an equal number counterclockwise. If your ankles are stiff, injured, or weak, this can be a surprisingly demanding exercise, and you may find you will need to start with fewer rotations, perhaps only five to ten in each direction. As your ankles open with practice, build up the number of rotations at a comfortable pace, until you can do twenty-five in each direction with no sense of strain.

4. Kneeling Toe Stretch

This is a relatively strong toe stretch, and should only be attempted after your feet are open and soft from the previous exercises, to reduce any potential discomfort. Once this is learned, it may be combined with the Seated Forearm Stretch described in chapter 5, on shoulder and arm exercises.

Purpose

Physical: Strongly stretches the muscles and ligaments of the toes; stretches the

plantar fascia (at the sole of the foot).

Energetic: Opens the Bubbling Well point, Kidney 1, and so benefits the Kidneys, strengthening bones, sexual/reproductive/urogenital functioning, and general vitality. The release of tension in the ligaments and fascia benefits the Liver, increasing calmness and physical and emotional balance. Improves grounding, being present. Helps to reverse some aging processes.

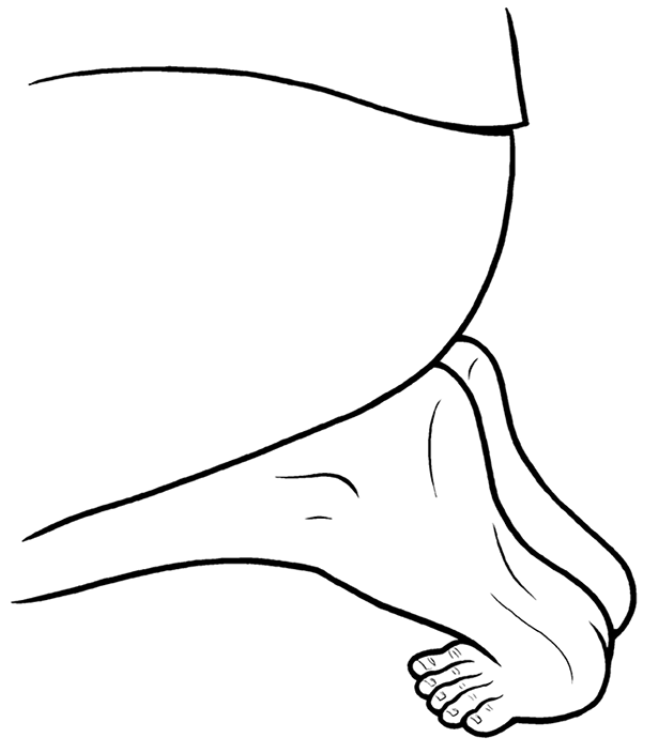
Techniques used

Stretching, Daoist yoga, focused breathing. If you are already experienced in daoyin, you can additionally benefit by using your mind to direct qi through your Kidney meridian.

Method

Kneeling with your knees close together, on a mat or other soft surface to protect your knees, position your feet so they are more or less perpendicular to the ground, toes pointed forward with the pads of the toes in contact with the ground. You may find your little toe curling, wanting to point rearward. If that's the case, use your hands to position your little toe (or any other that may need it) properly. Next, sit on your heels, putting more of a stretch on your toes (**Fig 1.18**). Keep your body as close to perpendicular as possible, hands placed palm down on your knees or thighs. The more you sit back on your heels, the greater the stretch becomes (**Fig 1.19**). Once you've reached the current limit of your stretch, where it just begins to be uncomfortable, use focused breathing to relax in that posture, releasing the discomfort along with any tension on each exhale.

Do not overdo this stretch, especially if you are new to it, or if it is particularly difficult for you. Ten or fifteen seconds may be a good place to start. Even when this stretch becomes completely comfortable, there is no need to do it for more than two minutes.



Figures 1.18 and 1.19 (Kneeling Toe Stretch)

[contents]

Two

Leg, Seated

These exercises can be practiced on their own, or immediately following the foot exercises. They can readily begin where the foot exercises left off, and are practiced while seated on the floor.

The first two exercises in this series make use of paidagong, tapping and patting practices. In Chinese medical theory, one of the main causes of discomfort and pain, and one of the main factors considered to be at the root of many diseases when left untreated, is stagnation. In its milder phase, it is qi stagnation—energy that should be flowing freely but is unable to do so, stuck in a location or many locations within the body. This could be due to physical or emotional trauma, inactivity, exposure to environmental conditions when prolonged or in a person sensitive to an environmental factor, inappropriate diet, or it could be a side effect of various drugs (prescription or otherwise), among many other possibilities. Over time, qi stagnation may worsen, weaken surrounding body tissues, and cause a stagnation of blood or other body fluids that should normally be in motion. These are more significant pathological changes engendering various diseases.

Paidagong can assist in reversing such stagnation. The gentle impact caused by tapping and patting induces a penetrating wave of energy through the body. When that wave encounters a pocket of stagnation, it can gradually break it up when applied over time, like a constant drip of water can wear down a boulder. As the stagnation breaks apart, any associated health problem will resolve.

These exercises are a good starting point for all that will come next. Even without a known health problem to remedy, the waves generated by tapping and patting gently relax and open the body, remove restrictions and make it easier to do the more challenging exercises.

1. Tapping and Patting the Outter Legs (Yang surfaces)

Purpose

Physical: Relaxes and softens body tissues, promotes blood circulation in the legs, prepares the legs for later exercises.

Energetic: Breaks up local qi stagnation, promotes qi flow through the Gall Bladder, Stomach, and Spleen meridians of the leg. The Spleen is one organ which engenders blood and thus assists in the physical purpose of this exercise. The Spleen and Stomach dominate the muscles, and the Gall Bladder (along with the Liver) dominates the tendons and ligaments, so this will energetically condition those body tissues.

Technique Used

Paidagong.

Method

Sit on the floor, legs extended in front of you. Curl the fingers of both hands into soft fists, not tightly clenched, with a little sense of space at the center of each palm. With any part of your fist that is easiest for you (back, sides, or front), use both to tap down one leg, starting at the thigh and slowly working your way down to your lower shin (**Fig 2.1**). Tap and pat down and up your leg a number of times. Vary the rate, rhythm, and force of the impacts, so your body won't be able to adapt to a repetitive pattern. While this is not crucial, it will enhance the benefit you get. Do not pat or tap strongly enough to hurt yourself. If you find any area of tenderness, stay on that area just a little longer than the others, since it indicates an area of stagnation that needs dispersing.



**Figure 2.1 (Tapping and Patting the Outer Legs—
Yang surfaces)**

Focus primarily on the top and outside of your leg here. We'll address the inner leg in the next exercise. While it's okay to tap on bony surfaces, it's more difficult to create that wave through bone, and you run a small risk of hurting yourself, so stick to the soft tissue for now. Do this for a few minutes on one leg, and then repeat on the other leg.

Variation

If you're unable to sit on the floor with your legs extended, or are unable to reach down to your lower leg, do this exercise seated in a chair, possibly with your foot resting on a footstool if necessary to reach your lower leg.

2. Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs(Yin surfaces)

Purpose

Physical: Relaxes and softens body tissues, promotes blood circulation in the legs, prepares the legs for later exercises.

Energetic: Breaks up local qi stagnation, promotes qi flow through the Spleen, Liver, and Kidney meridians of the leg. While equally important for men and women, these leg meridians treat a variety of women's issues, including various menstrual disorders and menopausal discomforts. Commonly, women will feel some tenderness at various places along these pathways. That's no cause for alarm, but does indicate a need for attention in those areas. In both sexes, they tone the urogenital system and can improve both sexual and general vitality. In men, the prostate is benefited.

Techniques Used

Paidagong, stretching.



Figure 2.2 (Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs—Yin surfaces)

Method

Sit on the floor, with your legs positioned in one of three ways.

1. Place the soles of your feet together, and draw your heels to or toward your perineum. Your knees should be on or near the floor, with little or no discomfort to them or to your inner thighs. (**Fig 2.2**) This is the most advantageous position, since it stretches and opens the tendons, ligaments, and muscles in your legs, helps open your perineum, and gives you the best, easiest access to your inner legs. However, your legs should be comfortably relaxed. If they are not, choose one of the other seated modifications.



Figure 2.3 (Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs—Yin surfaces)

2. Sit on a zafu or other firm cushion, and either place the soles of your feet together and draw them toward your perineum as above, or cross your legs at or just slightly above your ankles (**Fig 2.3**).

3. Sit on any comfortable cushion on the floor. If necessary, you can even sit on your bed. Use enough cushions or pillows under each knee to prop them up at a comfortable height, so your legs do not feel overstretched. Place your soles together at whatever distance is comfortable for you, or cross your legs at or slightly above your ankles (**Fig 2.4**).



Figure 2.4 (Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs—Yin surfaces)

Curl the fingers of both hands into soft fists as before. With any part of your fist that is easiest for you (back, sides, or front), use both fists to tap down the inner surface of one leg, starting at the thigh and slowly working your way down to your lower calf, just above your heel and behind your ankle (**Fig 2.2–Fig 2.4** on previous pages). It's also okay to start from this region and pat your way up to the top of your inner thigh, and you will want to tap and pat up and down your leg a number of times. Vary the rate, rhythm, and force of the impacts so that your body won't be able to adapt to a repetitive pattern. Do not pat or tap strongly enough to hurt yourself. If you find any area of tenderness, you should stay on that area just a little longer than the others, since it indicates an area of stagnation that needs dispersing.

Do this for a few minutes on one leg, and repeat on the other leg.

3. One-Leg Hamstring Stretch

Purpose

Physical: Stretches all the muscles at the back of the leg. While mainly targeting the hamstrings, it also stretches the calf muscles (which includes the Achilles tendon, just above the back of the heel) and the low back. If more of your tension resides in those places, you may feel the stretch more strongly there.

Energetic: Stimulates qi flow through the Urinary Bladder meridian, which runs up the back of the legs, and helps resolve qi stagnation in that portion of that meridian. This benefits the functions of the bladder, and can help to improve most urinary tract problems. With the inclusion of the Urinary Bladder here added to the paidagong exercises above, all regular acupuncture leg meridians are addressed.

Techniques used

Stretching, Daoist yoga, focused breathing.

Method

Sit on the floor with your left leg extended, the back of the knee very close to the ground without locking your knee, and the sole of your left foot placed as high up against your inner right thigh as is comfortable. If necessary, place a cushion under your right knee. Align your torso to face in the direction of your right leg, so that it is not twisted to the right or left. Keep your back straight, not bent or bowed, although it will incline forward when you follow the next instructions. With both hands, grab your right foot, and keep it held perpendicular to the ground, not tilted forward, left or right. Take a comfortable deep breath in, and while slowly letting it out, gently pull on your foot and incline your upper body toward your right leg (**Fig 2.5**). Do your best to keep your upper body directly aligned with your leg, not turned to the right (the most common mistake) or to the left, nor bent (curved or arched) forward. Repeat the breath and gently increase the stretch on the exhale. When you reach the place beyond which you can stretch no further, hold that stretch for five to ten slow, deep breaths, allowing yourself to relax into that stretch more fully with each exhalation. Then release your foot, place both hands at the sides of your left knee or slightly higher, and use them to push yourself back to an upright seated position, so you don't strain your back. Repeat the stretch on your right leg.

For extra benefit: Put some attention on the back of your knee during this stretch, and see if you can specifically allow it to soften, release, and lengthen. The hamstrings cross the back of the knee and attach to the lower leg, so releasing the back of the knee will increase your hamstring stretch. For anyone already doing the neigong practice of pulsing body cavities and joint spaces, or for anyone already practicing the inner aspects of taiji and qigong and aware of the importance of keeping the backs of the knees open, this stretch and the next two that follow will aid in releasing any restrictions in the physical tissues, so those neigong aspects will become easier to attain. Additionally, opening the region around the entire knee benefits the He Sea points. He Sea points normalize the directionality of qi flow, especially as related to the Stomach and Intestines, and promote general vitality.

Variations

Variation One: If you're unable to reach your foot, you may use a belt or towel to wrap around the sole of your foot. Hold the belt or towel with both hands, as close to your foot as possible for you (**Fig 2.6**), and continue as directed above.



Figure 2.5 (One-Leg Hamstring Stretch)



Figure 2.6 (One-Leg Hamstring Stretch)

Your ultimate goal is to be able to lay your chest fully onto your leg, but this must be accomplished by relaxation and release, and never with any feeling of strain. It may take many weeks, months, or longer for you to be able to do that, and if you have been very tight for a very long time, that deep a stretch may not ever be possible for you. The important thing is to improve over time, and enjoy the benefits that occur along the way. When you reach your natural limit, whether laying your chest on your leg or not, stay in that stretch for approximately two minutes, but no longer than that, as then you can begin to overstretch your ligaments. The easiest and most beneficial way to time a two-minute stretch is to time the length of your comfortable inhale and exhale, and then simply count your breaths to the appropriate number. For example, if you can comfortably inhale and exhale in a fifteen-second cycle, four breaths per minute, then you'd hold your stretch for eight breaths. This method allows you to use your breath to deepen your relaxation the longer you hold the stretch.

Variation Two: In some forms of Daoist Yoga, any increase in a stretch only occurs through release of tight or held muscles, not through actively using even the slightest force, such as carefully pulling on your foot as is otherwise done in this exercise. That release is accomplished by combining at least three factors. The first is your breath,

which is directed to a tight muscle or region on an inhale, and the tension is released to whatever degree is possible on the exhale, leaving your body along with the breath. Numerous directed breaths can be done to facilitate this process. The second factor is the force of gravity. As you engage in any stretch, gravity will usually play a role in increasing the stretch. In this exercise, gravity will push on your torso as it lowers toward your leg. Feel its influence and allow it to open your body into a deeper stretch. The third factor is your mind. Some part of your mind must contact the tense, tight, or held muscle, and be used to soften and release that held tension. There is no physical effort involved in this aspect, and this is different than using your breath and gravity, though it may seem similar. Personal guidance by a teacher may be necessary for you to fully incorporate this release, but you won't harm yourself in any way by trying it if it appeals to you. In this variation, you may place your hands on the floor, on your lower leg, or grasp your foot, but you do not pull on your foot or leg at all. You can use this approach in the following exercise, and in any other stretch, often involving a forward bend, where gravity and breath may be used together along with mind.

4. Two-Leg Hamstring Stretch

This exercise should only be attempted once the One-Leg Hamstring Stretch can be done comfortably, regardless of how far you can lower your torso to your leg.

Purpose

Physical: Stretches all the muscles at the back of the leg. While mainly targeting the hamstrings, it also stretches the calf muscles. Here the lower back is opened considerably more than it is in the one-leg stretch, and in a necessarily more balanced way. If your low back is particularly tight, as it is for many people, be prepared to feel more restriction there, which must be opened too in order to get the deepest hamstring stretch possible.

Energetic: Stimulates qi flow through the Urinary Bladder meridian, which runs up the back of the legs, and helps resolve qi stagnation in that portion of that meridian. This benefits the functions of the bladder, and can help to improve most urinary tract problems. Because the low back is opened more, the Kidneys are both massaged and relaxed. The Kidneys and Urinary Bladder are a Yin-Yang organ pair; addressing them simultaneously in this exercise will mutually increase the benefit to both.

Techniques used

Stretching, Daoist Yoga, focused breathing.

Method

Sit on the floor with both legs extended in front of you, lightly touching, or spread up to a foot apart if necessary. Keep your back straight, not bent or bowed, although it will incline forward when you follow the next instructions. With both hands, grab your feet,

and keep them held perpendicular to the ground, not tilted forward or splayed out to the sides. Take a comfortable deep breath in, and while slowly letting it out, gently pull on your feet and incline your upper body toward your legs. Do your best to keep your upper body directly aligned with your legs and not bent (curved or arched) forward. Repeat the breath and increase the stretch on the exhale, further lowering your chest toward your legs (**Fig 2.7**). When you reach the place beyond which you can stretch no further, hold that stretch for five to ten slow, deep breaths, allowing yourself to relax into the stretch more with each exhalation. Then release your feet, place both hands at the sides of your knees or slightly higher, and use them to push yourself back to an upright seated position, so you won't strain your back. Repeat the stretch once or twice more.

Variation

Some very flexible people may have large bellies that interfere with being able to lay their chest on their legs. In that case, it's fine to spread your legs wider to allow more space for your belly (**Fig 2.8**).

As in the One-Leg Hamstring Stretch, your ultimate goal is to be able to lay your chest fully onto your legs, but this must be accomplished by relaxation and release, never with any feeling of strain. It may take many weeks, months, or longer for you to be able to do that. When you reach your natural limit, whether you're able to lay your chest on your legs or not, stay in that stretch for approximately two minutes, but no longer than that, as then you can begin to overstretch your ligaments. When you're able to stretch, for two minutes, do only one of these stretches in any practice session.



Figure 2.7 (Two-Leg Hamstring Stretch)

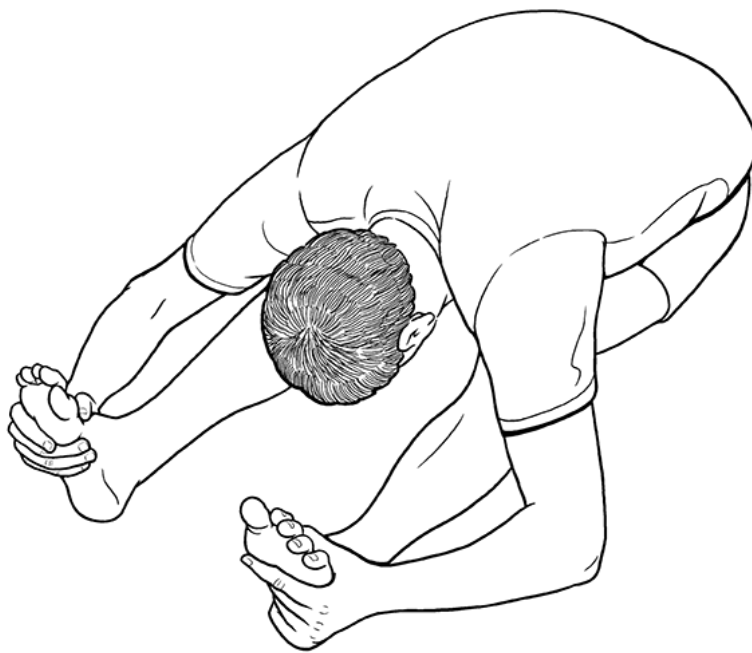


Figure 2.8 (Two-Leg Hamstring Stretch)

5. Seated Split

Purpose

Physical: Stretches the leg adductors (the inner leg). There is also a stretch at the back of the legs (hamstrings and calves) and the low back, but since you've already opened those regions in the previous exercises, you may not notice much of a stretch there. This will also stretch the muscles at the inner knee, and spread the perineum.

Energetic: Engages and activates the Leg Yin meridians, continuing and deepening the benefits of the second paidagong exercise in this section. Those include the Liver, Spleen, and Kidney meridians. The more qi stagnation and obstruction you were able to release in that practice, the easier it will be to get deeper in this stretch, and the sooner you will be able to release any associated muscle tension.

Techniques used

Stretching, Daoist Yoga, focused breathing.

Method

Sit on the floor with both legs extended, spread as far apart as is comfortable, with the back of the knees very close to the ground without locking them, and feet perpendicular to the ground. Keep your back straight, not bent or bowed, although it will incline forward when you begin the stretch. If you are completely new to this type of stretch, begin by placing the palms of your hands on the floor in front of you, spread slightly wider than shoulder width apart. This is to give support both to your low back and your inner legs, both of which may feel strongly stretched in this exercise. Take a comfortable deep breath in, and while slowly exhaling, lower your torso straight forward, evenly between your legs, using your hands to help support the weight of your upper body. Do your best to keep your back straight and not bent (curved or arched) forward. Repeat the breath

and increase the stretch on the exhale (**Fig 2.9**). When you reach the place beyond which you can stretch no further, hold that stretch for five to ten slow, deep breaths, allowing yourself to relax into the stretch more fully with each exhalation. Then use your hands to push yourself back to an upright seated position, so that you don't strain your back. Repeat the stretch once or twice more.



Figure 2.9 (Seated Split)

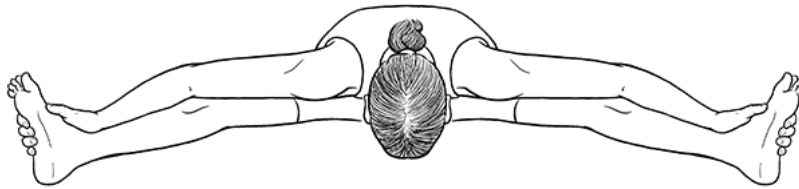


Figure 2.10 (Seated Split)

When this becomes easy for you and you are able to be close to having your head touch the ground on the forward bend, or if you find this easy from the start, you can do the more full version of this exercise. Begin seated on the floor as above, with both legs extended, spread as far apart as is comfortable, with the back of the knees very close to the ground without locking them, and feet perpendicular to the ground. Keep your back straight. Place your hands on your legs, below your knees, and as you incline forward as above, slide them down to your feet. Grab your feet and keep them held perpendicular to the ground, not tilted forward or splayed out to the sides. Take a comfortable deep breath in, and while slowly exhaling, lower your torso farther forward, evenly between your legs. Continuing to hold your feet perpendicular to the ground, gently pull on them as you incline your upper body forward. Repeat the breath and increase the stretch on the exhale (**Fig 2.10**). When you reach the place beyond which you can stretch no further, hold that stretch for five to ten slow, deep breaths, allowing yourself to relax into that stretch more fully with each exhalation. Then release your feet, place the palms of your hands on the floor in front of you spread slightly wider than shoulder width apart, and use them to push yourself back to an upright seated position, so you won't strain your back. Repeat the stretch once or twice more.

Variation

Some people find either seated version of this stretch too difficult. Rather than pass on this exercise entirely, this variation will be particularly helpful in beginning the stretch, and will in time enable you to do the seated version. Here, lie on your back with your butt against a wall, your legs extended upward, the backs of your knees as close to the wall

as you can comfortably get them without locking them. Your arms should be palms down on the floor, either extended straight out to your sides or angled toward the wall, whichever feels best to you. In this position, spread your legs as wide as is possible, still keeping them against the wall for support (**Fig 2.11**). That may only be a few inches apart to start with. Breathe, and on each exhalation, be conscious of letting your legs relax more. If they relax enough to spread a little wider, that's great. In this position, gravity is only working on the weight of your legs, which is much less than the weight of your torso, so it won't make you want to stretch more than you're able. When you reach the point at which your legs won't spread any farther, take five to ten slow, deep breaths, allowing yourself to get more relaxed with whatever amount of stretch you have. Then bring your legs back together, roll to one side or the other, and sit or get up. Whenever you're ready, after a few weeks or month of this variation, you may feel ready to begin the seated version of this exercise to increase the benefits it provides.

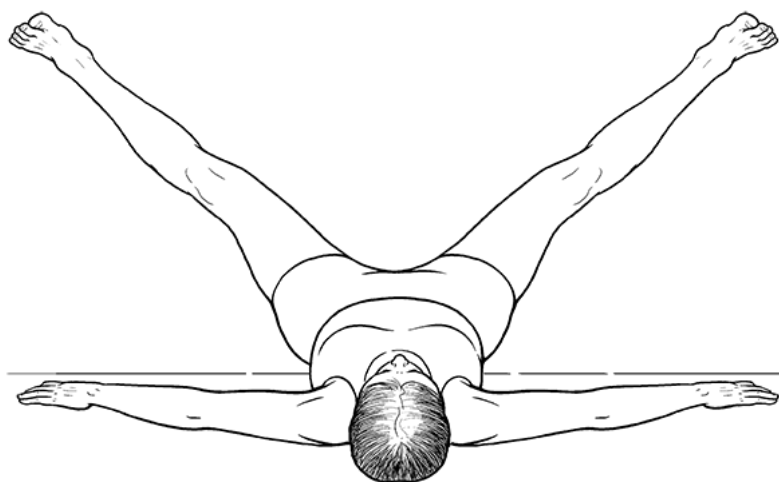


Figure 2.11 (Seated Split)

Note: While there is no absolute order in which these exercises must be practiced, the order given throughout this book is suggested because it helps to progressively open related body regions. At this point, you may want to practice the 8. Seated Torso Twist, the eighth exercise given in chapter 6. It can readily prepare the Hip Rotator Stretch, and it is convenient because you are in a seated position on the floor.

6. Hip Rotator Stretch

The hip rotators cross below and deep into the gluteal muscles (hip extensors), attaching on one end to the femur, in the upper thigh. They function both on the legs and the hips, and are included here as this exercise conveniently follows the ones preceding it. It could just as appropriately have been placed in the chapter on hip exercises.

Purpose

Physical: Opens up the hip rotator muscles, helps stabilize the pelvis and hips, reduces low back and hip pain. The hip rotators attach to the upper thigh bone (the greater trochanter of the femur) on one end, and to the inner and lower border of the upper edge

of the back of the hip bone, the ilium of the upper pelvis and ischium and ischial tuberosity of the lower pelvis on the other. Most of the muscles in the low back attach to the upper border of the outer surface of the ilium, while some attach to the sacrum. When either or both sets of muscles are tight, it creates a type of tug of war, with the upper part of the ilium as the center point of the war. That causes hip and pelvis instability, which can lead to various gait problems, and is one significant cause of the lower back pain that plagues so many people.

Energetic: Opens and activates the lower portion of the Gall Bladder meridian, which runs through the postero-lateral to lateral (outside) portion of the butt and down the lateral sides of the legs. This meridian facilitates physical, emotional, and energetic balance. The Gall Bladder meridian is called the Leg Shao Yang, or Lesser Yang meridian, and occupies a region of medium depth in the body. In that position, it can harmonize more interior processes (Yin) with more exterior (Yang), as one aspect of energetic balance. Through its paired Yin organ, the Liver, it helps promote the smooth flow of qi, which aids in creating emotional stability. Through its connection with the extra meridian called the Yang Linking meridian, which also runs up the lateral leg following a similar pathway as the Gall Bladder meridian, it helps to stabilize and strengthen the leg. Here we can see how the physical and energetic purposes dovetail nicely and are mutually supportive.

From a different viewpoint, there is a type of very deep bodywork known as Structural Integration, or Rolfing, as it came to be known, since it was developed by a woman named Ida Rolf in the 1920s. Through decades of recorded observation Rolfers empirically found that an emotion commonly stored in the hip rotator is the sense of having “unrealistic expectations of oneself or of others,” and that releasing the hip rotators often helped to similarly release that life perspective.

Techniques Used

Stretching, Daoist Yoga, focused breathing.

Method

Lie on your back with your knees bent and your feet flat on the floor. Cross your right leg over your left, with your lower right leg just above the ankle, resting just above (toward your torso) your left knee. This creates a roughly triangular space between your thighs. Reach through that space with your right hand, and reach around your left leg with your left hand (**Fig 2.12**). Interlock your fingers just below your knee. Alternatively, if you can't reach your left leg below the knee, you can interlock your fingers behind your upper left thigh, just above the back of the knee. Before doing anything else, do your best to relax your entire back and shoulders, so that there is no bow in your back and both your low back and shoulders comfortably touch the floor. You may already feel a

significant stretch through your right buttocks, where the hip rotators are located.



Figure 2.12 (Hip Rotator Stretch)

Your ultimate objective is to be able to pull on your left leg so that your right lower leg rests on your chest. This must be approached very slowly and carefully, and may take many months to accomplish. As with the other stretches, you'll use your breath to gradually increase the stretch. Take a comfortable deep breath in, and while slowly exhaling, gently pull on your left leg, drawing it, and your right lower leg, closer to your body (**Fig 2.13** on next page). Do your best to keep your back relaxed, straight and not bent, with your shoulders remaining on or very close to the floor. Repeat the breath and increase the stretch on the exhale. When you reach the place beyond which you can stretch no further, hold that stretch for five to ten slow, deep breaths, allowing yourself to relax into that stretch more fully with each exhalation. Then switch leg positions and repeat, stretching your left hip rotators. You can repeat this stretch up to two more times per side. Once you can get your leg to touch your chest, hold one stretch for two minutes, and that's enough.



Figure 2.13 (Hip Rotator Stretch)

If your hip rotators or low back are very tight, you may not be able to increase the stretch at all in the beginning. In that case, just hold your starting position, and breathe as directed above without trying to increase the stretch. Do try to become more relaxed and release whatever tension you may feel, especially focusing on the exhales to best accomplish that. As you are able to increase the relaxation and release, you will find that you can begin to increase the stretch.

7. Back Rock and Roll

The last exercise in this section is not so much for the legs as it is for the whole back. It's included here because being that it is begun sitting on the floor, it's convenient to do this one after or between any of the previous exercises.

Purpose

Physical: Opens the back, mobilizes each vertebra to decrease vertebral compression and increase vertebral motion, which helps treat some types of back pain and reduces back stiffness. It also massages all the small muscles of the back, including the ones that attach to adjacent vertebrae, so they get more blood, oxygen, and nourishment to improve function and flexibility.

Energetic: Stimulates the Urinary Bladder meridian, which runs in two parallel lines on either side of the spine down the centerline of the back of your legs. In addition to benefiting the Urinary Bladder itself, there are points along the UB meridian that access the energy of every organ in the body, so the whole body receives energetic benefit. Stimulates the Du meridian (Governing Vessel) which governs the function of all the yang meridians in the body, another way to energetically benefit the whole body. Between the physical and energetic benefits, this can be a very invigorating exercise.

Techniques Used

Primarily, rocking as a type of self-massage. For people who already have experience, the mind can also be used to increase the daoyin aspect of inducing and guiding qi through the UB and Du meridians.

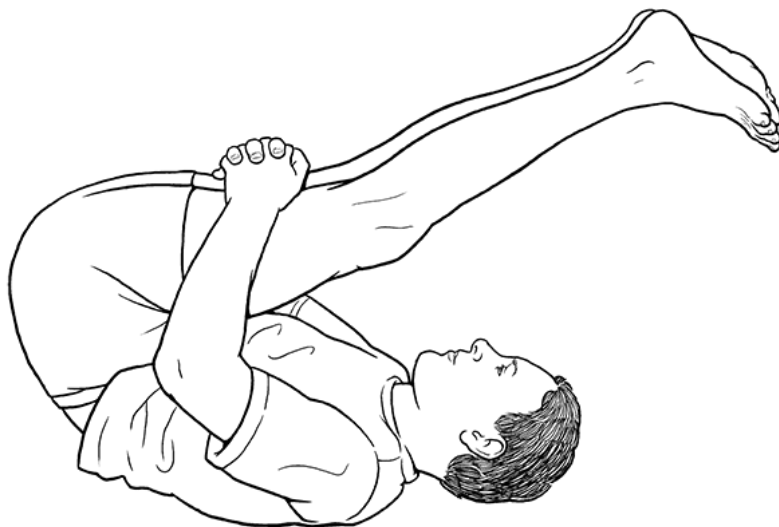


Figure 2.14 (Back Rock and Roll)

Method

Sitting on the floor, bend both knees so that both feet are flat on the floor in front of you, with your knees drawn toward your chest. Interlock the fingers of both hands at the lower thigh, below the bend at the back of the knees. Keep your fingers interlocked through the entire practice. With a forward bend in your back, rock backward so that your shoulders come close to touching the floor. As you do so, unbend your knees, extending your legs, and let your toes approach the floor behind your head (**Fig 2.14** on previous page). This provides an extra stretch to your hamstrings, and extra stimulation to your UB meridian. Then, bend your knees and use that momentum to roll yourself back up to the upright seated position in which you began. Then continue to rock backward and roll forward, in a fairly quick rhythm. Let yourself have fun with this one! If you do this exercise on a regular basis, repeat between ten to fifteen times for its general health benefits. If you want to do more though, you can do as many as you'd like.

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Three

Leg, Standing

1. Quadriceps Stretch

Purpose

Physical: Stretches the quadriceps muscles. This will reduce pain and increase flexibility in the legs and hips. This is an important counterpoint to stretching the hamstrings, done in the previous set of exercises. The hamstrings and quads perform opposite functions in the legs and hips, and ideally they should be balanced for optimal functioning.

Energetic: Opens and stimulates the upper leg portion of the Spleen and Stomach meridians. This will improve digestive functions, blood flow/circulation, muscle tone, and energy production. Because of its location, this will also improve the strength and stability of the legs and hips. In the first variation, you will also be activating your Liver and helping to smooth the flow of Liver qi.

Techniques used

Stretching, guided breathing. In the second variation, daoyin is also used.

Method

Stand near a wall, facing to your right, with your left shoulder facing the wall. Place your left hand on the wall for balance. Shift all your weight to your left leg, and bend your right knee, lifting your right heel toward your butt. With your right hand, grasp the front of your right foot where your foot joins your leg. If your knee is angled forward so that it's pointing even slightly to the front of your body, draw it backward, so that your knee points directly to the floor. If you can comfortably point your knee slightly rearward, that's okay, and will increase the quad stretch (**Fig 3.1**). Now, take a full, slow, deep breath in. Direct your breath to your quadriceps, and on the exhale relax the quads and gently pull your right heel closer to your butt, keeping your knee pointed toward the ground or slightly to the rear. Repeat this a few more times, until your heel reaches your butt or until you can bring it no closer. Take a few more slow, deep, breaths, relax more into the stretch with each exhalation, and then let go of your foot and lower it to the ground once

more.

Be careful that you are not putting undue pressure within your knee. If you feel any pain within your knee or feel like there's pressure building within it, you will need to stop and try this simpler version. Before beginning, get a long towel, soft belt, or rope. Stand by the wall as directed above, left hand to the wall for balance. Hold the ends of the towel (or belt or rope) so that it forms a loose loop at the side of your right foot. With your right foot, step backward through the loop, so the towel crosses the front of your ankle where your foot joins your leg, and the sole of your foot is pointed rearward. Now you can pull up on the towel and it will draw your foot higher, behind you. If you can, point your knee to the ground as above. If you can't, it's okay to let your knee point forward some. That will reduce the quad stretch, but that's preferable to hurting your knee. Note that pulling your leg higher while continuing to bend your knee in front of you will not increase your quad stretch at all and so serves no purpose (**Fig 3.2**, shown here without the towel, in the primary version of the exercise). Keep your knee pointed downward as much as possible, without pain to your knee, while using the towel to pull your heel closer to your butt. Follow all the other directions above.

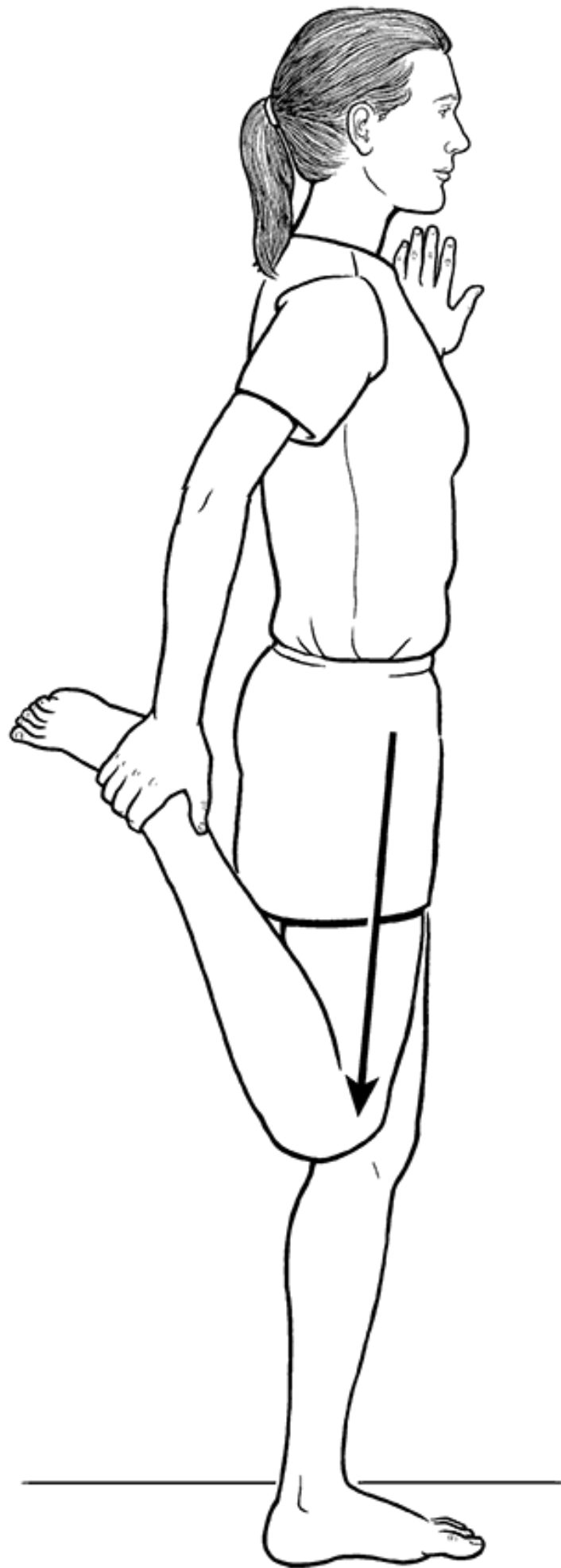


Figure 3.1 (Quadriceps Stretch)

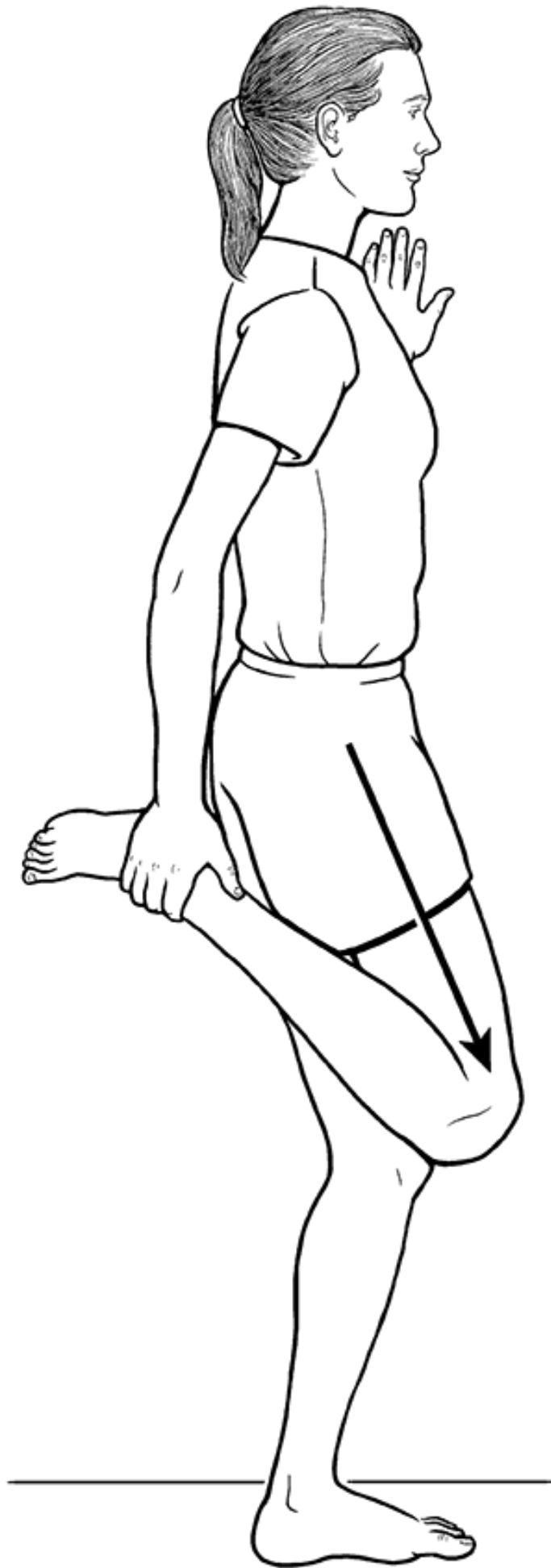


Figure 3.2 (Quadriceps Stretch)

Variation

This variation will additionally benefit the liver energetically, and may help to relieve tension in the nervous system. Once you are in your full quad stretch, heel to butt or as close as you can get it, fix your eyes on a spot in the room in front of you. Your eyes are the sense organ associated with the liver, and by keeping your eyes open and fixing them in one location, it will help keep your liver qi smooth and stable. Now, remove your left hand from the wall, and balance on your left leg only. If you have trouble with this, put your hand on the wall once more, then do this. Flatten your low back by relaxing it rather than by tensing your abdomen to pull it flat. Don't let your butt stick out. That indicates low back tension, meaning your low back is not relaxed. Feel your tailbone pointing toward the ground. With your back flat, your butt not sticking out behind you, and your tailbone down, you will have a better chance of allowing your qi to penetrate through your left leg, rooting you to the ground energetically. Breathe comfortably, fully, and slowly. With your eyes fixed on a point directly across from you, remove your left hand from the wall (you can allow it to fall to your side) and just balance on your left leg. Is it easier for you this time? Good, that's progress!

If this was easy for you from the start, or when it becomes consistently easy for you as you advance, the next thing to do is to close your eyes. This removes the "qi anchor" for your liver. It's likely you will find it more difficult to keep your balance on one leg with your eyes closed, but it will become easier if you work on it, indicating your liver is becoming stronger and rejuvenated. Healthy, young people usually have no problem standing on one leg with their eyes closed.

2. Standing Ankle Stretches

These are adjunct exercises and can be used either as an alternative to or as a slight progression beyond the seated ankle stretches. Some of the seated ankle exercises should be done before attempting these, as they have the potential to be too strong a stretch if your ankles are not already opened some. The purposes and techniques used are the same as those in the seated ankle stretches, so will not be repeated here. These are stretches of shorter duration, so focused breathing will not be required, although you may include that if you'd like. There are two methods, each for a different stretch.

Methods

Method One: Outer Ankle (Supination): Stand with all of your weight on your left leg, your right foot lightly touching the ground. If you have any problems with balance, stand near a wall and use your left hand for support, as in Exercise 1 of this set, the *Quadriceps Stretch*. Maintaining contact with the ground, roll your right foot outward, to the right, so that the outer ankle moves toward the ground and the sole of your foot faces left (**Fig 3.3**). If your ankle is very flexible, you may get part of the upper surface of your

foot to touch the ground along the little toe side of your foot. If you are able to do that, you're additionally mobilizing, stretching, and opening some of the metatarsal bones (and related joint spaces) in your foot.

Be careful to avoid putting much weight on your right foot. It would be easy to overstretch your ankle that way. If you focus on the outward roll, you can safely increase the stretch as much as is comfortable. Hold it for just a few seconds, and then bring the sole of your foot flat to the ground once more. Rock your foot out, hold a few seconds, and return to starting position, repeating five or six times. Then shift your weight to your right leg and do the same with your left foot.



Figure 3.3 (Standing Ankle Stretches)

Method Two: Front of the Ankle: This has the additional energetic purpose of strongly opening the acupuncture points Stomach 41 and Liver 4, the Jing River points of the stomach and liver, and Stomach 42, the Yuan or Source point of the qi of the

Stomach.

Stand with all your weight on your left leg. Place your left hand on a wall for balance if needed. Move your right foot slightly rearward, placing the back (top) of your toes and the end of your foot on the ground, so that your sole is facing rearward and slightly upward behind you. With your right knee pointing toward the ground as in the Quad Stretch, move your right knee a little closer to the ground, which increases the stretch at the front of the ankle and along the top of the foot. When you have a good stretch, slowly rock your foot side to side so that at one end of the rock you are stretching more along the big toe side of your foot, and the other end you are stretching more along the little toe side (**Fig 3.4**). Be sure you feel the stretch equally along the whole front of your ankle and top of your foot through the slow arc of the side-to-side rock. After a few rocks, place your right foot on the ground once more, shift your weight to your left leg, and repeat the exercise with your left ankle and foot.



Figure 3.4 (Standing Ankle Stretches)

3. Back of Ankle/Achilles Tendon Stretch

Purpose

Physical: Opens the back of the ankle, stretches the Achilles tendon, stretches the calf muscles (gastrocnemius and soleus). This is the first ankle exercise to strongly address the back of the ankle. Together with the others, this will reduce all physical restriction and give the ankle the greatest opportunity to remain open (or be pulsed open for people who utilize that neigong practice within qigong and taiji).

Energetic: Stimulates the kidney Shu Stream point, K3, and the Urinary Bladder Jing River point, UB 60, which are found in the depressions between the Achilles tendon and the inner and outer ankle tips, respectively. Because of the meridian pathways and tissue

and organ associations, these points can help with various types of headaches, upper and lower backaches, and urinary, sexual, and menstrual disorders. This exercise also strengthens the low back, knees, and the overall functioning of the Kidneys. K1, the Kidney Jing Well point (the Bubbling Well point), will also be stimulated, providing additional benefit for the kidneys.

Techniques Used

Stretching, focused breathing.

Method

Face a wall, about one and a half to two steps away from it. Keep your right leg in place on the floor, and with your left leg, take a full step toward the wall. With your torso perpendicular to the floor, your legs should form a triangle and be bearing equal weight. Place both palms on the wall. If your torso inclines forward, that's okay. Keeping your right heel completely in contact with the floor, move your pelvis closer to the wall. You will feel the stretch increasing in your Achilles tendon (**Fig 3.5**). Do not let your head move closer to the wall, only your pelvis. As you do this, your left knee will bend, and you will shift more weight to your left leg. If you don't feel much of a stretch in your Achilles tendon, it means you are standing too close to the wall. In that case, push yourself back from the wall so that your torso is once again perpendicular to the floor. Take a half step backward with your right leg, and then follow the above instructions. When you feel a good stretch, begin your focused breathing, slow deep inhalations followed by slow deep exhalations, and relax your right Achilles tendon with each exhalation. Hold this stretch for one to two minutes, then switch leg positions, and repeat the exercise on the other leg.

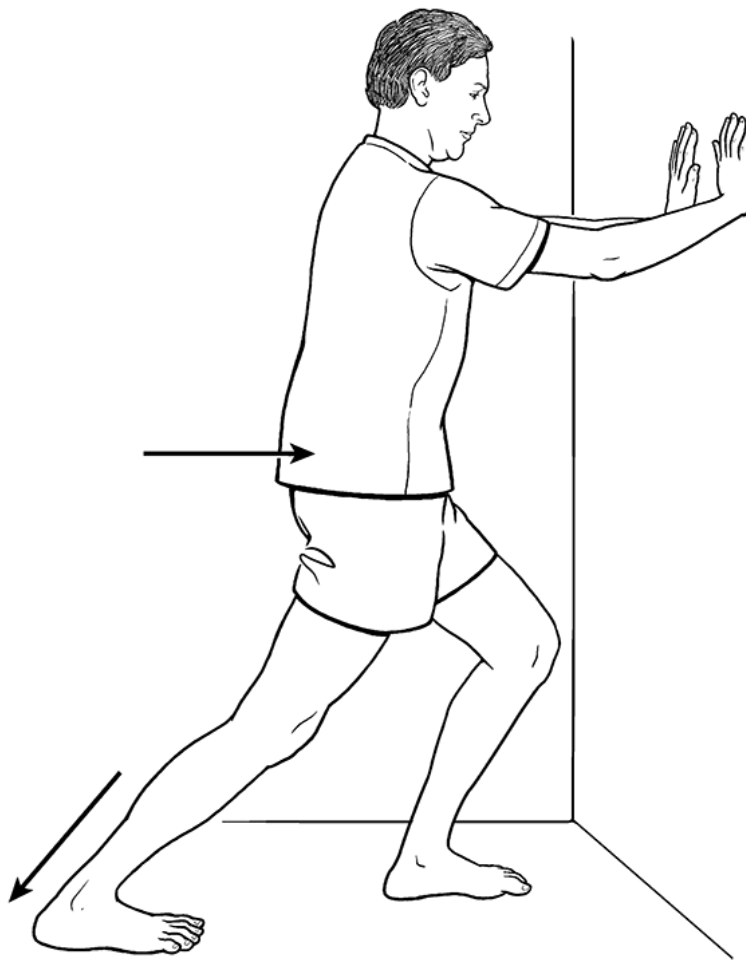


Figure 3.5 (Back of Ankle/Achilles Tendon Stretch)

4. Knee Rotations

This is an exercise that has some inherent risk to it, and one that I do not recommend for people with any type of knee problem. The only reason I include it here is because this is an exercise I have seen commonly taught by many Chinese instructors, and by others who have learned it from Chinese instructors, and in no case has any warning been made regarding its practice. With proper care, it may be relatively safely practiced by people with healthy knees. A safer alternative for everyone is the *Hula Rolls* (chapter 6, Exercise 3), which are primarily for the low back and hips, but puts the knees through a minimal rotary side bend. *Torso Twist with Arm Swing* (chapter 6, Exercise 1) also safely allows for some slight rotary motion in the knee.

While the idea of this exercise is to open the knee joint, which is a good, desirable outcome, here's why it can be risky nevertheless. The knee joint is designed to bend and straighten, and really, that's it. It does have some lateral flexibility, used for example when skiing, but that's more of a safeguard against damaging the joint than it is a motion that the joint is intended for on a regular basis. When overdone, or when too much weight is placed on the joint when the knee is in that lateral or medial position (bent to the outside or inside of the leg), that can cause tears in the meniscus, the cartilaginous discs within the knee joint that serve as cushions and shock absorbers, or medial or lateral collateral ligament damage. The collateral ligaments provide stability in the knee.

These are relatively common injuries among athletes, dancers, and heavy labor workers. With those cautions stated, this is the exercise.

Purpose

Physical: Puts the knee through its full rotational range of motion, facilitates opening the knee joint, releases tension in the muscles and ligaments around the knee.

Energetic: Stimulates and activates the leg He Sea points, located around the knee. The Sea points are used for various intestinal disorders. Both Yin and Yang Sea points primarily work on the yang organs, notably the stomach. Some clear Damp Heat in the Urinary Bladder and Intestines, which can manifest as inflammation, irritation, and infection, causing diarrhea, urinary difficulties, and edema. The knees are also an indicator of Kidney health. Kidney problems tend to shunt qi into the knees, causing knee discomfort, pain, contracture, swelling, or instability. Freeing up the qi in the knees will help the local knee problem and will relieve the underlying Kidney issue, if not resolve it outright.

Techniques used

Joint mobilization, acupressure to the soles of the feet.

Method

While standing, bend forward enough to be able to put your hands on your knees. Keep your back as straight as possible, not curved forward or arched back, although inclined forward. With your hands, put just enough pressure on your knees so they feel supported and stable (**Fig 3.6A** on next page). Maintaining just that slight pressure, make clockwise circles with your knees (**Fig 3.6B**). They will naturally bend more when in the 12 o'clock position, and straighten more in the 6 o'clock position. Feel for and slightly accentuate the increase of pressure on the soles of your feet through this rotation, so you feel more pressure on the left side of your feet in the 9 o'clock position, the balls of your feet in the 12 o'clock position, the right side of your feet in the 3 o'clock position, and your heels in the 6 o'clock position. That will stimulate various acupoints on the soles of each foot. After ten to twelve circles clockwise, reverse direction for the same number of circles counterclockwise.

The circles should be done at a comfortable rate, one circle every one or two seconds. Be careful to not make the circles too large, as that would contribute to the potential knee injuries outlined earlier.



Figure 3.6A (Knee Rotations)

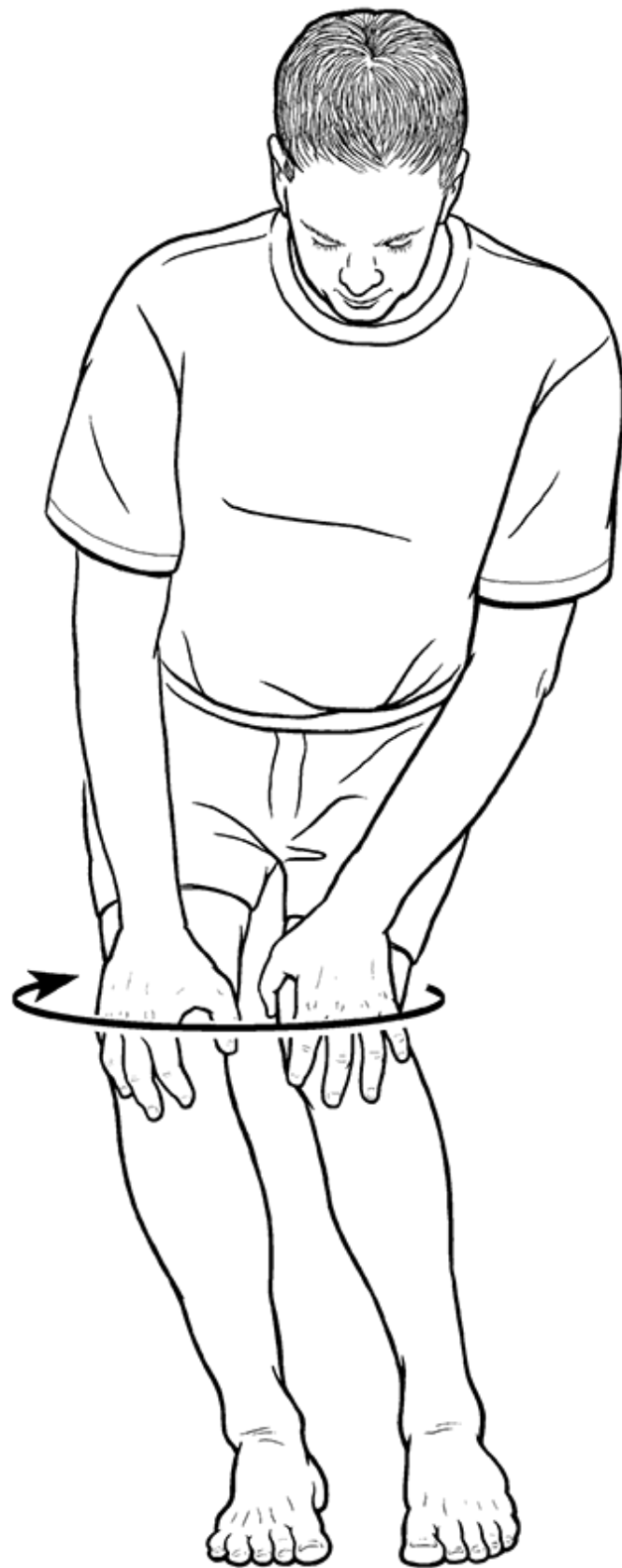


Figure 3.6B (Knee Rotations)

[contents]

Four

Finger and Hand

In this age of ubiquitous computer keyboards, used both at work and at home, and gaming consoles used extensively for recreation, more people than ever suffer from various repetitive stress injuries, tendinitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, and ulnar nerve damage. Many also simultaneously suffer neck, shoulder, and upper back pain from hunching in front of a computer monitor, holding their hands, wrists, elbows, and shoulders tight in unnatural positions, often unconsciously, for hours at a time. Of course, there are many other causes of hand and arm discomfort—sports-related and other injuries, arthritis, musician's overuse and postural complaints, and so on—but computer-related problems cut across almost all walks of life and are particularly prevalent today. No matter what the cause, these exercises are of tremendous help in preventing and reversing such conditions, and many can be done during a short five- or ten-minute break while still sitting at your desk.

1. Flex and Extend Fingers

This is a good warm-up exercise for all the finger and hand exercises that follow.

Purpose

Physical: This exercise involves actively using the muscles in your hands to mobilize your finger and hand joints. It draws more blood into your hands and fingers, and because the involved muscles also attach in the upper forearm, these benefits will occur throughout your forearms too. Blood always brings nutrition, oxygen, and qi in and helps remove local toxic accumulations should any be present. It also helps lubricate the joints and muscles, relaxing those which may be stiff and achy from relative inactivity or overuse, effectively "dried out" from reduced blood flow or inflammation. Conversely, in some people blood and other body fluids may pool, creating a swelling. The activity of this exercise will help pump out the pooled fluids, and over time it will strengthen the muscles so that whatever your finger, hand, and forearm concerns may be, they will improve and have a reduced likelihood of returning.

Energetic: Stimulates all the Five Phase points (Jing Well, Ying Spring, Shu Stream, Jing River, and He Sea) to varying degrees.

The Hand Jing Well points are stimulated indirectly, as blood, moved by the physical aspect of the exercise, brings more qi to the tips of the fingers where the Well points are located. The Jing Well points have an invigorating effect on the mind, and so this practice may help to improve your focus throughout the course of your practice session and into the rest of the day. Mental functioning is additionally stimulated by any directed hand usage. We use our hands to grasp and apprehend, which are more than metaphors for the grasping and apprehending synonymous with understanding. The Spring and Stream points are involved in this result, and other deeper, core energetics outside the scope of this book also come into play.

The hand Ying Spring acupuncture points are more strongly stimulated. They are located on the hand, near where the fingers join the hand. As in the Foot Spring points, they are useful in clearing heat. One of the Western correlations to clearing heat means reducing inflammation, so your fingers and hands will benefit from that energetic effect. Pericardium 8, Laogong, is the Ying Spring point located in the center of the palm. For anyone already sufficiently advanced in a qigong practice, keeping P8 open and activated will assist in sensing, projecting, and absorbing qi.

The arm Shu Stream points are found at various places around the circumference of the hand, primarily between where the fingers join the hand, and around the wrist. Stream points are most commonly used to treat Bi syndromes (more colloquially called Painful Obstruction syndromes), which are often the same as or associated with various types of arthritis pain. This is especially true if Damp is part of the pathogenic picture, which is almost always the case in Bi syndromes. That Damp may or may not visibly manifest as swelling or edema.

The Arm Jing River points are classically used to clear both heat and cold sensations, specifically centered around the chest. They are useful for cough, asthma, throat, and respiratory problems, especially those associated with heat or cold. They are also useful to help resolve local pain.

The Arm He Sea points are located around the elbow. Classically they are used to treat a variety of stomach and intestinal disorders, and many have psychological, psychoemotional, and psychosomatic functions. This exercise only minimally stimulates the Sea points, so while you will notice some of those benefits, they will be correspondingly slight.

Techniques used

Simple flexion and extension.

Method

Standing or seated, with your arms hanging loose at your sides, make moderately tight fists with both hands, tighter than a loose fist but not so tight that your hands feel hard.

Then open your fingers wide, extending them fully so that they are angled slightly backward from your hand, and so that you can see the tendons standing out at the backs of your hands (**Fig 4.1** on next page). If your hands are painful or weak, open and close them fifteen to twenty times. Otherwise, open and close them as many times as you can until a comfortable fatigue sets in. Try for a hundred times. When that becomes easy, gradually increase the number by five to ten each week, until you get to two hundred repetitions. Beyond two hundred, you may make your muscles stronger, but not much additional benefit will occur.



Figure 4.1 (Flex and Extend Fingers)

The rate or speed can vary depending on the purpose for which the exercise is being practiced. In the case of painful, arthritic, or weak hands, a slow pace is fine, as you just want to begin to soften and open your hands. Fully open and close your hands once every two to three seconds. In all other cases related to the level of self-care presented here, a brisk rate is preferred. Fully open and close your hands two or three times each second. If you remember how you may have counted seconds as a child, "one-Missis-sippi, two-Missis-sippi ..." and open and close your hands to that third-of-a-second count, that's an easy way to do three each second. Even at that rate, be sure to make a moderately firm fist and then fully extend your fingers each time.

2. Backward Finger Extension and Stretch

Purpose

Physical: Extend and stretch the fingers to open the joint spaces and stretch muscles; stretch the palmar aponeurosis (the thick, tendinous membrane on the palm) and reinforce the connection from palm to fingers.

Energetic: Each finger has at least three separate energetic correspondences. Six of

the twelve main acupuncture meridians end at the tips of the fingers; in Korean hand acupuncture, the hand is a hologram for the entire body; and in the Daoist Five Element perspective, each finger corresponds to one of the five elements. While this exercise will produce benefits in each of those systems—each influences the whole body in their own way—I learned this from a Daoist qigong master whose focus was on the Five Element connection, so that’s what I’ll address here. The thumb corresponds to the Earth Element (Spleen and Stomach), the index finger to Wood (Liver and Gall Bladder), the middle finger to Fire (Heart and Small Intestine, and secondarily, Pericardium and Sanjiao), the ring finger to Metal (Lung and Large Intestine), and the little finger to Water (Kidney and Urinary Bladder). As you exercise each finger, the corresponding Element and related body regions are stimulated and functionally benefited. This is not mediated through the meridian system (the meridian end points of each finger do not correspond to the Five Elements) but through Element correspondence in a type of reflexology.

Techniques Used

Extension and stretch, tissue lengthening, Daoist reflexology.

Method

This may be done seated or standing. Place your left hand in front of you, directly in front of the center of your chest, so that the palm is facing directly to the right, with fingers pointing upward toward the sky. Your elbow should be out to your left side and slightly lowered so your forearm is angled downward just a bit. Keep your armpit open, so that you could easily fit your right fist in it. Keep your shoulder down and the muscles in your shoulder and neck relaxed.

Grasp your left hand with your right, placing the fingers of your right hand on the back of your left, and your right thumb approximately in the center of your palm (**Fig 4.2** on next page). Make your grip firm, but not tense or hard. Hold your right hand completely stationary in space; do not let it move as you follow the next instructions (**Fig 4.3A** on next page).

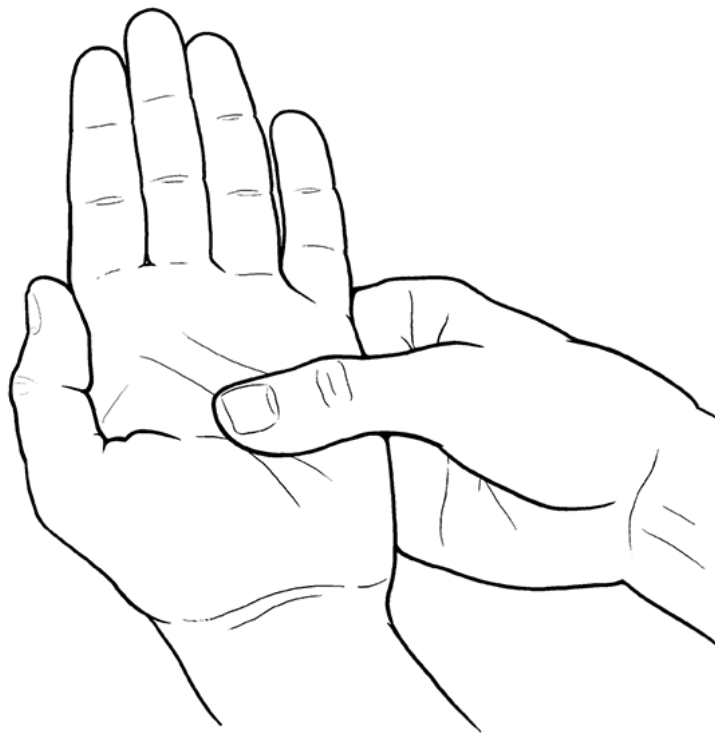


Figure 4.2 (Backward Finger Extension and Stretch)

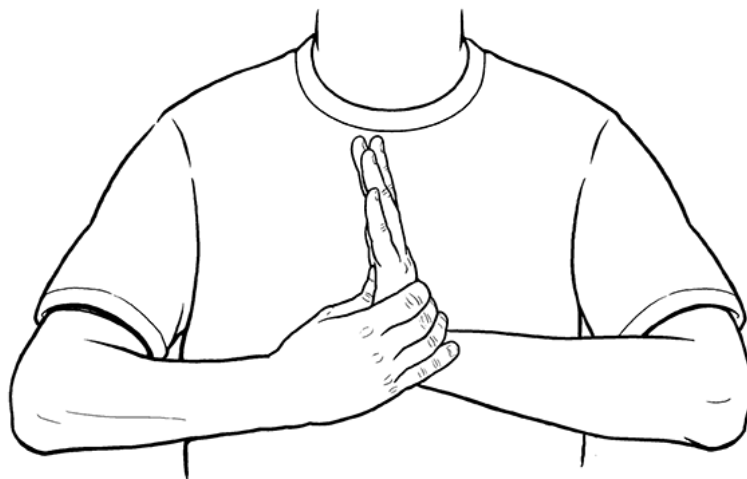


Figure 4.3A (Backward Finger Extension and Stretch)

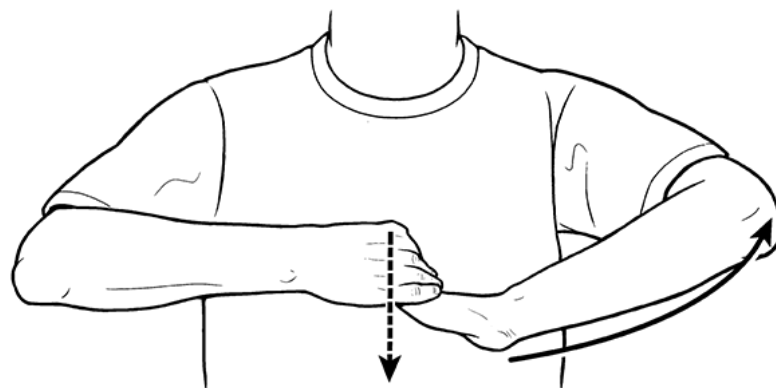


Figure 4.3B (Backward Finger Extension and Stretch)

Extend your left elbow farther out to the left, in a gentle upward-curving arc, almost as though you are trying to jab your elbow into the person next to you, but slowly (**Fig 4.3B**). Do not lift your left shoulder, do not tighten the muscles between your shoulder and neck, and keep your head straight, perpendicular to the ground. Feel your shoulder

blade rotating, so that the top of your shoulder blade moves toward your spine, and the bottom tip moves out and up, mirroring the arc in your elbow. In fact, the movement should come from your shoulder blade as much as you are able.

The movement of your arm will pull your left hand through your right. Feel for the pull and stretch of the left palmar aponeurosis. To begin with, target your little finger with your right hand so it is bent backward and stretched as it passes between your right thumb and fingers. Pull your little finger entirely free of your right hand, and then return to the starting position and repeat twice more still focusing on the little finger. Then, by positioning your right hand just a little closer to your left thumb, repeat the left arm movement three more times, focusing on the ring finger this time. Continue in this way through the middle and index fingers, extending and stretching each three times.

In order to extend and stretch your thumb, you will need to reposition both hands. Turn your left hand so that your palm faces the center of your chest, and your left thumb is pointed upward toward the sky. Place the weblike portion of your right hand between the thumb and index finger up against the weblike portion of the left hand. Grasp your left thumb with your right thumb and index finger. Once in this position, do not let your right hand move in space; keep it completely stationary. Move your left arm exactly as before, and that will pull your thumb through your right hand. Repeat two more times. Then, switch hands and do the above again to extend and stretch your right hand.

3. Shake Out Fingers, Hands, and Arms

Purpose

Physical: Brings more blood into the hands, improves circulation, loosens tight muscles, softens tendons, relaxes ligaments.

Energetic: Helps break up local pockets of stagnant qi and discharges it from your hands and fingers.

Techniques Used

Shaking/Vibration.

Method

Standing, or sitting in an armless chair or stool, let your arms hang comfortably at your sides. Keep your hands as relaxed as you are able, and do not actively engage any muscles in them. Keep your forearms as relaxed as possible too, since most of the muscles in the fingers and hands attach in the forearms. Using the muscles in your upper arms and shoulders, shake out your hands as though you are trying to shake off oil or anything similar stuck to your hands. Moving your hands in many directions (circles, forward and back, side to side) will provide the most thorough benefits. All of those directional motions should come from your upper arms and shoulders, not your wrists and hands, so if any direction is too awkward for you in the beginning, skip it for now rather

than using any hand muscles.

There's no set amount of time you need to do this exercise, but you should do it long enough so that your hands feel noticeably looser and more relaxed. This is one instance where longer—up to a few minutes—may be better, as long as there is no pain.

4. Wrist Rolls

Purpose

Physical: Opens the joint spaces in the wrists; promotes movement of the synovial fluids, helping to lubricate the wrist joints; further softens the tendons at the wrist.

Energetic: Stimulates the arm Jing River points, primarily found at and slightly above the wrists. The Arm Jing River points are classically used to clear both heat and cold sensations, specifically centered around the chest. They are useful for cough, asthma, throat, and respiratory problems, especially those associated with heat or cold. They are also useful to help resolve local pain and are beneficial in treating arthritis and various types of tendinitis.

Stimulates the Arm Shu Stream points. The Arm Shu Stream points are found at various places around the circumference of the hand, although the Yin Shu Stream points of the Lung, Pericardium, and Heart are directly at the wrist and are stimulated more strongly. Stream points are most commonly used to treat Bi syndromes (more colloquially called Painful Obstruction syndromes), which are often the same as or associated with various types of arthritis pain. This is especially true if Damp is part of the pathogenic picture, which is almost always the case in Bi syndromes. That Damp may or may not visibly manifest as swelling or edema.

Technique Used

Active joint mobilization.

Method

Standing or sitting, interlock your fingers in front of you at about chest height or slightly higher, in a prayer position (**Fig 4.4A** on next page). Keep your shoulders relaxed and your elbows down, pointing toward the ground throughout this exercise. Imagine there is a small ball between your hands at the center of your palms. Do your best to keep that ball stationary in space, as though it's fastened to the top of a pole, and rotate your hands around that ball in one direction, keeping your fingers interlocked and palms together. While you are rotating your hands around that imaginary stationary ball, one wrist will move higher while the other moves lower (**Fig 4.4B**). That will make your forearms move up and down slightly, in a piston-like motion. You'll also notice that they rotate some, following your wrist motion. That's natural, and normal in this exercise.

Do twenty to twenty-five rotations in one direction, and then reverse directions for an

equal number. You may feel or even hear pops and clicks in your wrists. That may happen more in one direction than the other. That's okay. Over time, they will diminish. If you want to do more than twenty-five repetitions, that's okay too. For most people, more repetitions will make those clicks disappear sooner.

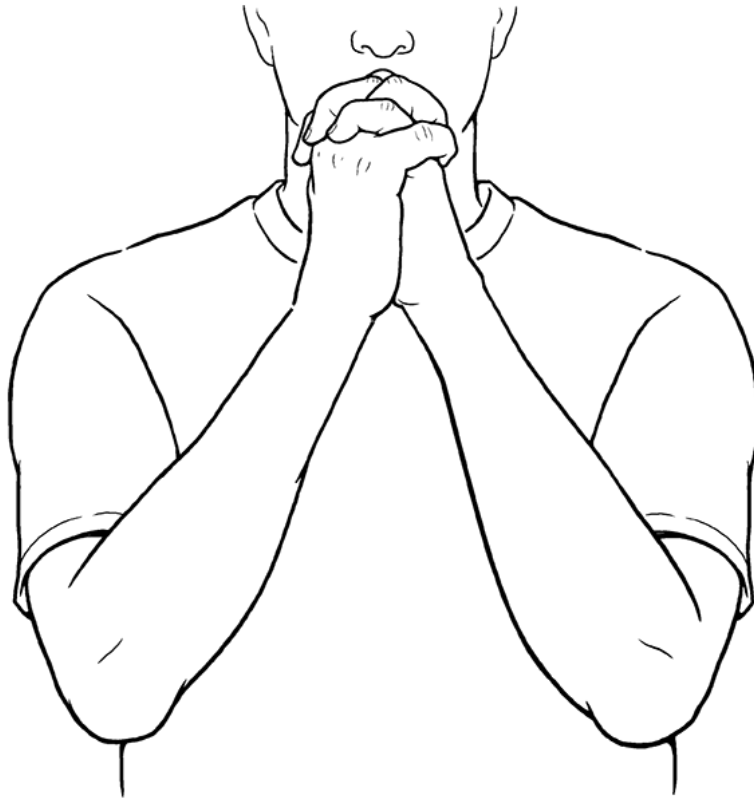


Figure 4.4A (Wrist Rolls)

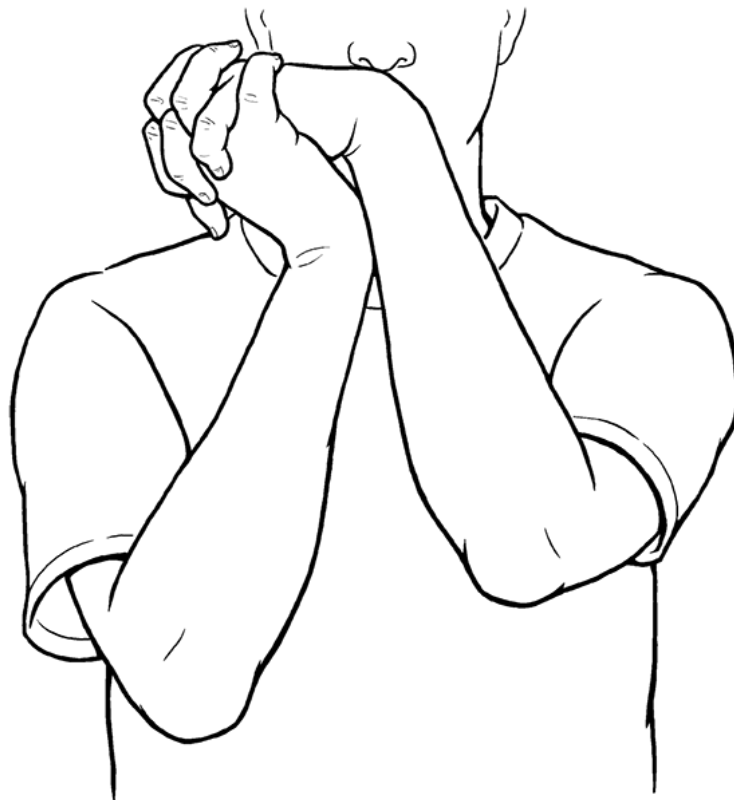


Figure 4.4B (Wrist Rolls)

Five

Shoulder and Arm

The shoulders are an often neglected part of the body. Most people only give them any thought when there's an obvious problem, such as arthritis, bursitis, frozen shoulder or a rotator cuff injury. From a purely anatomical perspective, consider that they are connected to your neck and upper back. While many people complain of neck and upper back pain, few take into account that shoulder tension may be either a primary cause or a contributing factor.

On an energetic level, the shoulders directly connect all of the acupuncture Arm meridians—Lung, Heart, Pericardium, Large and Small Intestines, and Sanjiao/Triple Burner—as well as the Left, Right, and Central core channels used in qigong with the torso, where those pathways continue. They are the site of the Shoulder's Nests, which directly affect the health of the heart and lungs as well as amplify qi flow through the Side Channels. While learning to mobilize the shoulder blades directly is most advantageous, having freely movable and functionally strong shoulders is a big step in that direction. The vertebrae between the shoulder blades influence the health of the heart and lungs both neurologically and energetically, and there are points along the inner borders of the shoulder blades that have similar influences.

The openness and free flow of qi through your shoulders and arms is a two-way street. Each must function equally well on all levels for either to function optimally. This should help you understand how the health of your shoulders and arms is crucial to your overall health. The exercises in this section will assist you to that end.

1. Shoulder Rolls

Purpose

Physical: Mobilizes the shoulder joint; engages and softens the muscles of the shoulder, upper back and lower neck; massages the thoracic and axillary lymph glands; gently prepares the shoulders for all the following exercises.

Energetic: Activates energetic structures deep within the shoulder girdle (the Shoulder's Nest), which help maintain various energetic connections between the torso and arms; activates acupuncture meridian pathways, notably the Heart and Lung

meridians, benefiting their functions. Activates the acupuncture points of the upper back that lie between the shoulder blades. These also primarily benefit the Heart and Lungs. Activates the acupuncture points between the front of the shoulders and the chest (the front of the Shoulder's Nests), which primarily benefit the Lungs.

Technique Used

Active joint mobilization.

Method

Standing, or seated in an armless chair, let your arms hang at your sides. Keep them as relaxed as you can throughout this exercise (**Fig 5.1A**). Move your shoulders forward and slightly upward, compressing your chest a bit. Feel your shoulder blades spread away from your spine (**Fig 5.1B**). Then, in a rolling motion, move your shoulders upward toward your ears. In this position, they should be hunched up, but not too tight (**Fig 5.1C**). Continue to circle your shoulders rearward. In this position, feel your shoulder blades compressed toward your spine while the front of your chest opens (**Fig 5.1D**). Finally, continue to circle your shoulders downward until they return to their starting position (**Fig 5.1A**).

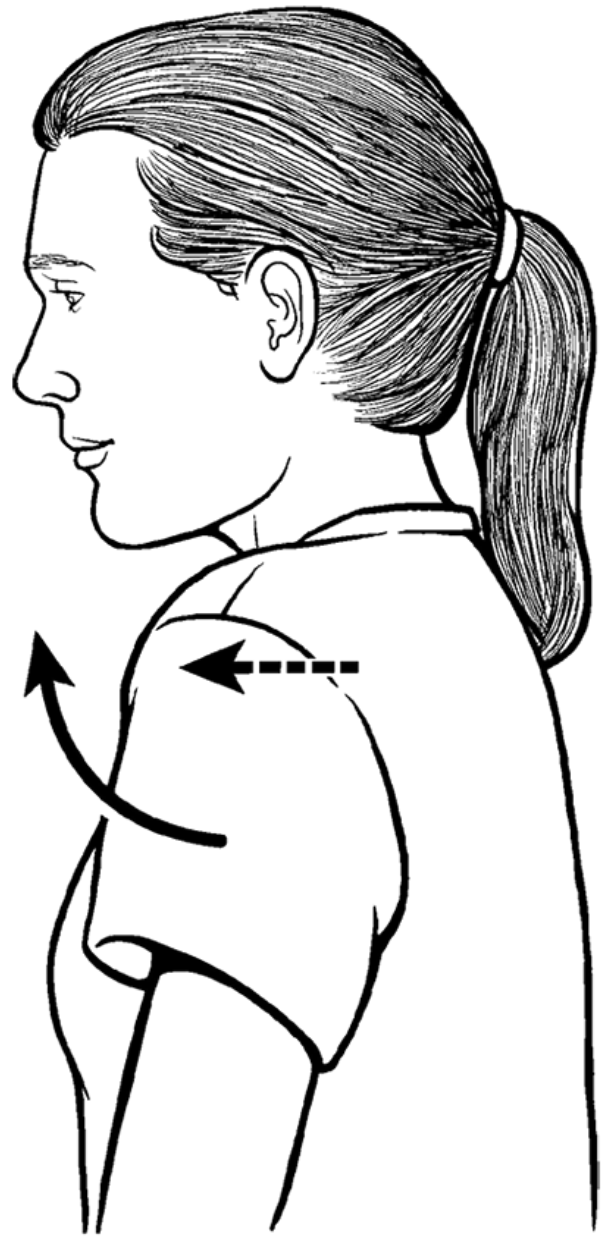


Figure 5.1A and 5.1B (Shoulder Rolls)

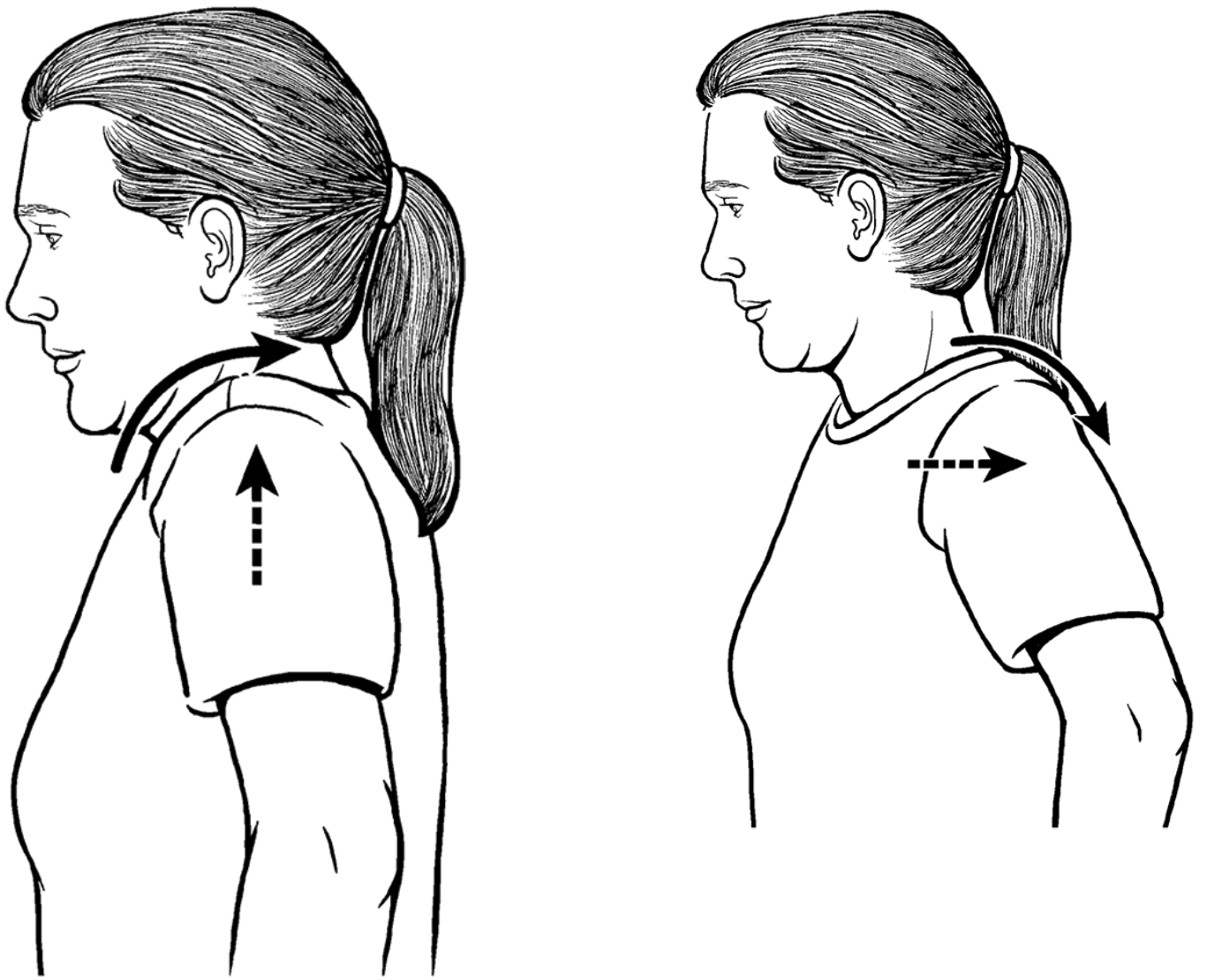


Figure 5.1C and 5.1D (Shoulder Rolls)

Throughout all those landmarks, keep your shoulder motion smooth and constant, making rearward circles at a moderate pace, one circle every two or three seconds. Do ten to fifteen circles, and then reverse direction for the same number of circles. If this is the only shoulder exercise you do on any given day, you can do up to fifty circles to really open the shoulders and related energetics.

2. Shoulder Shrug and Drop

The physical and energetic purposes are the same as in the Shoulder Rolls. This provides an additional physical benefit for the upper shoulder and lower neck muscles (mainly, the trapezius). Energetically, there is an additional benefit to the local Gall Bladder meridian acupuncture points. This more strongly releases shoulder tension and may help reduce headaches.

Techniques used

Joint mobilization, muscle tense/relax, guided breathing.

Method

Standing, or seated in an armless chair, let your arms hang at your sides. Keep them as relaxed as you can throughout this exercise. Begin as in the previous exercise. In a rolling motion, move your shoulders forward and then upward toward your ears. This time, shrug your shoulders tightly, and hold them tight for two to three slow, deep breaths (**Fig 5.2A**). Imagine they are being pulled up by strings. Then, on a quick exhalation, imagine the strings are suddenly cut, and drop your shoulders straight down (**Fig 5.2B**). This should feel like a release, and not like a push downward. Then reverse the direction of your shoulder shrug, moving your shoulders circularly rearward and then up. Hold the shrug tightly, breathe, and release as before. Do a minimum of five in each direction for a total of ten shrugs.



Figure 5.2A (Shoulder Shrug and Drop)



Figure 5.2B (Shoulder Shrug and Drop)

3. Shoulder Blade Protraction and Retraction with Arm Rotation

Purpose

Physical: Moves the shoulder blades toward and away from the spine to free any lingering tension between the shoulder blades. Opens the front of the chest. Pumps the inner (front) surface of the shoulder blades toward and away from the back of the ribcage. This massages the subscapularis muscles, often a hidden source of shoulder and upper back pain. The arm rotation begins to soften and release tension through the entire arm.

Energetic: Same as for the Shoulder Rolls. Additionally, there is a small energy center between the front of the shoulder blades and the back of the ribcage. The activation of that center further releases shoulder and upper back tension, and benefits the function of the Shoulder's Nests. The rotational movement of the arms activates qi flow through the Arm meridians, primarily the Lungs, Heart, and Intestines, deepening the benefits begun in the previous shoulder exercises.

Techniques used

Joint mobilization, rotational stretch, guided breathing.

Method

Stand with your arms hanging relaxed at your sides. Breathe in, and on an exhalation, move your arms forward toward the center of the front of your body, keeping your fingers pointing to the ground, while rotating your arms so that the backs of your hands touch, or come as close to touching as you can get (**Fig 5.3A**). Your shoulders will hunch forward and slightly compress your chest. Feel your shoulder blades spread away from your spine,

while they simultaneously move closer to the back of your ribcage. Feel the muscle of your arms twist inward, similar to wringing out a wet towel. Then, on an inhalation, move your arms toward the rear of your body, rotating your arms outward so that the palms of your hands face out to the sides, or slightly rearward if you can (**Fig 5.3B**). Feel your shoulder blades squeeze close to your spine, while they simultaneously move rearward away from the back of your ribcage. Feel the muscle of your arms twist outward. The front of your chest opens wide. Cycle forward and back ten to fifteen times, at a rate that is comfortable for your breath. Try to keep your breath smooth and continuous. Do not hold it at any time, neither at the end of the inhalation nor exhalation.



Figure 5.3A (Shoulder Blade Protraction and Retraction with Arm Rotation)

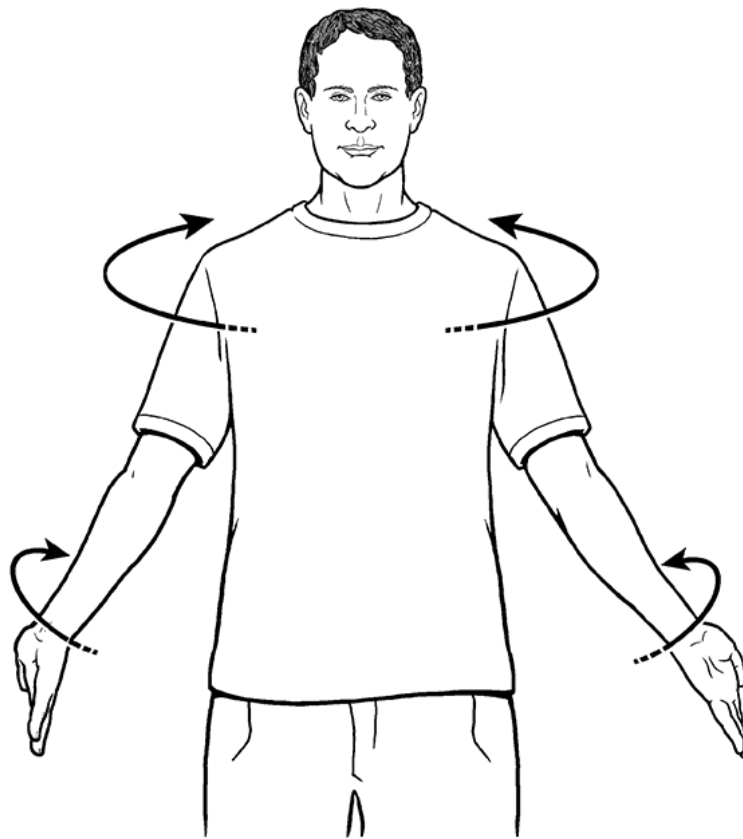


Figure 5.3B (Shoulder Blade Protraction and Retraction with Arm Rotation)

4. Hand Over Shoulder Stretch

Purpose

Physical: Increases the stretch and opening of the back of the shoulders.

Energetic: The benefits are similar to those of the Shoulder Rolls. Although this exercise is very different, it addresses the same region of the body in a way that opens and stimulates the same points, in a slightly stronger way.

Techniques used

Passive stretch, guided breathing.

Method

Sitting or standing, place your left hand on your right shoulder, with your left elbow pointing straight in front of you. With your right hand, reach over your left arm and grasp it just above your left elbow. Turn your head to the left, as far as is comfortable, while you pull your left arm to the right (**Fig 5.4** on next page). If your left shoulder is able to open and stretch, your left hand will slide behind your right shoulder, toward your right shoulder blade.

When you've reached the end of your stretch, hold it, and take a few slow, deep breaths. Breathe into your left shoulder, and on each exhalation, try to release more tension from that shoulder. Your stretch may increase. Hold this stretch for about thirty seconds to begin with. As you end the stretch, allow your head to face forward once more. Then repeat this stretch for your right shoulder. Gradually increase the length of

the stretch to two minutes over the course of a few weeks or longer.

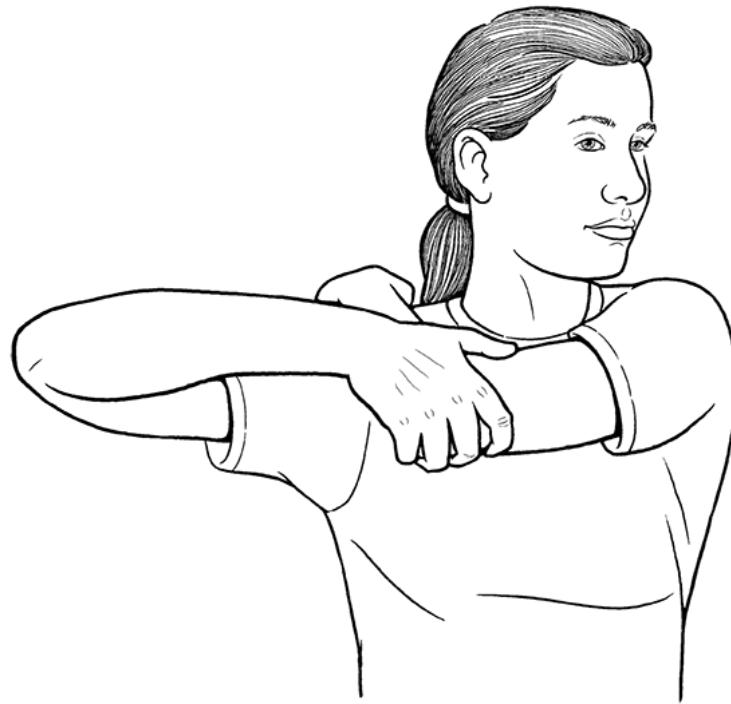


Figure 5.4 (Hand Over Shoulder Stretch)

5. Whole Arm Tap and Pat

Purpose

Physical: Softens and relaxes all the muscles in the arm; increases blood flow through the arm; prepares the arm for the following exercises.

Energetic: Strongly clears energetic blockages throughout the arm; stimulates qi flow through all the Arm meridians (Heart, Lungs, Pericardium, Small Intestine, Large Intestine, and Sanjiao).

Techniques Used

Paidagong: The gentle impact caused by tapping and patting induces a penetrating wave of energy through the body. When that wave encounters a pocket of stagnation, it can gradually break it up when applied over time, like a constant drip of water can wear down a boulder. Often it will happen more quickly than you might imagine. As that stagnation breaks apart, any associated health problem will resolve.

Method

Sitting or standing, hold your right arm loosely extended front of you. Curl the fingers of your left hand into a soft fist, not tightly clenched, with a little sense of space at the center of the palm. With any part of your fist that is easiest for you (back, sides, or front), tap and pat down your right arm, starting where your shoulder meets your neck, and slowly work your way down to your wrist. Tap and pat down and up your arm a number of times. Make sure to include the front, back, and sides of your arm equally. Vary the rate, rhythm, and force of the impacts, so that your body won't be able to adapt to a repetitive

pattern. While this is not crucial, it will enhance the benefit you get. Do not pat or tap strongly enough to hurt yourself. If you find any area of tenderness, you should stay on that area just a little longer than the others, since that indicates an area of stagnation that needs dispersing. Then repeat for your left arm.

6. “Breast Stroke” for the Shoulders

Purpose

Physical: Strongly stretches and opens all regions of the shoulder; stretches and benefits the front of the chest; massages and pumps the region between the shoulder blades; pumps the inner (front) surface of the shoulder blades toward and away from the back of the ribcage. This massages the subscapularis muscles, often a hidden source of shoulder and upper back pain; increases blood circulation in the arms, all the way to the fingertips; mobilizes and lubricates the joints (shoulder blades, shoulders, elbows, wrists, hands, and may include the upper thoracic vertebrae, between the shoulder blades). The more you can access the region between your shoulder blades, the more you will also neurologically benefit your heart and lungs. The spinal nerves that innervate those organs exit your spinal cord just below the fifth and third thoracic vertebrae respectively.

Energetic: Opens the shoulders energetically; activates the Shoulder’s Nests; pumps and so activates the energy center (gate) between the front of the shoulder blades and back of the ribcage; strongly stimulates qi flow through all the arm meridians. In addition to energetically freeing up the whole arm, shoulder girdle, and chest, the net result is a strong benefit for both the Heart and Lungs.

Techniques used

Conventional and rotational stretch, active joint mobilization.

Tip: For advanced practitioners already familiar with pulsing—a neigong practice, the teaching of which is outside of the scope of this book—include pulsing open whenever stretching is stated, pulsing closed on the bends. Other pulsing variations are possible in this exercise, so feel free to experiment and see what works best for you.

Caution: Unlike most other stretches in this book, there is a ballistic aspect to this stretch. That is, your arms move quickly to the end of their range of motion, and then there is a “bounce back” from that end point. Take care not to be too vigorous, especially if you have a current shoulder problem or if you easily dislocate your shoulder. Although injury is very unlikely in this exercise, it is possible.

Method

Stand and fully extend your arms in front of you at shoulder height, palms facing downward (**Fig 5.5A**). Pull your arms rearward, bending your elbows, retracting your shoulder blades toward your spine, and bending the palms of your hands a little so there is just a slight curve in your hands and fingers. To get your shoulder blades to fully

retract, feel as though you are trying to touch your elbows together behind you (**Fig 5.5B**). (You won't really be able to do this!) Although your shoulder blades are close together, see if you can simultaneously feel them move rearward, stretching very slightly away from your ribcage. Do your best to keep your forearms relatively parallel, and keep your palms facing toward the ground. (This is the first ballistic point, at which your arms rebound forward.)

Then extend your arms forward again, stretching to their starting position (**Fig 5.5C**). Feel the stretch extend all the way to your fingertips, but do not overstretch any part of your arm or hand, so nothing feels hyperextended or locked. Feel your shoulder blades spread away from your spine and simultaneously move closer to your ribcage.



Figure 5.5A and 5.5B (“Breast Stroke” for the Shoulders)



Figure 5.5C ("Breast Stroke" for the Shoulders)



Figure 5.5D ("Breast Stroke" for the Shoulders)

Next, keeping your arms extended at the same height, move them out to your sides. While moving them to your sides, simultaneously rotate them, so that when your arms are fully out to your sides, your palms are facing upward, or possibly slightly to the rear of straight up (**Fig 5.5D**). This creates a rotational stretch through your entire arm, adding another vector through which qi can be stimulated, as well as providing the fullest wringing type of stretch for your muscles. Try to make sure you are getting that rotation to come all the way from your shoulders, and not just your wrists or elbows. In this position, your entire arm should feel its greatest stretch, all the way through to the tips of

your fingers, more so than when they are extended straight in front of you. Your shoulder blades are once again fully retracted toward your spine, and are slightly stretched rearward away from your ribcage. (This is the second ballistic point, at which your arms rebound forward.)

Finally, keeping your arms extended at the same height, move them in front of you once more to your starting position (**Fig 5.5A** on previous page). While you move your arms, simultaneously rotate them so that your palms are facing down toward the ground when your arms are extended in front of you. Feel your shoulder blades spread away from your spine and forward toward your ribcage. This completes one repetition of the exercise.

Once the movement has been learned, this exercise should be performed at a fairly brisk pace, approximately one repetition per second. Again, use caution so you do not injure yourself. You can vary your arm height level some, between the top of your shoulder and a few inches below your armpit, so that you target different regions of your shoulder. For each repetition, keep your arm at the same height level. You can vary the heights from one repetition to the next if you'd like, though, or simply keep it at one height level throughout.

7. Shoulder/Arm Windmills

Purpose

Physical: Moves the shoulders through a different range of motion than the previous exercises. Increases blood flow within the shoulder and through the entire arm, and especially aids in getting blood into the hands through centrifugal ("to flee the center," directing blood to move from the center to the periphery) force. Pumps the axillary lymph glands. Mobilizes and stretches most of the muscles in the shoulder girdle. When done vigorously, it is a very safe no-impact aerobic exercise.

Energetic: Opens the acupuncture points around the Shoulder's Nests, stimulates qi flow through all the arm meridians, particularly the Heart and Lung meridians since they have points located within the Shoulder's Nests (shoulder girdle), and the Pericardium. The natural direction of qi flow in those arm yin meridians is from torso to fingertips, which is best supported by this exercise. The Arm Yang meridians of the Large and Small Intestines and Sanjiao also have points within the shoulder girdle which are also opened and benefited, but their natural flow of qi is from fingertips to torso, so some of the benefit is less than in the yin meridians. This also pumps the Shoulder's Nests and creates a more solid energetic connection between arms and torso.

Method

Stand with your feet parallel, slightly wider than shoulder width apart to provide a broader support base. Before you begin moving your arms, keep in mind that you want

them as relaxed as possible. This means that while you will be using some arm strength to move your arms, you want to try to get most of the movement to come from a slight bounce in your legs. Use the force of that bounce to propel your arms. This is how your arms will move.

Raise both arms up in front of the centerline of your body, forearms crossing at or slightly above the wrists (**Fig 5.6A**). As you raise your arms above your head, allow them to part, and move them outward (**Fig 5.5B**). Then allow them to fall, still extended in a relaxed fashion at the sides of your body, and come together in front of your low belly, once again crossing at the wrists. In this part of the exercise, your left arm just completed one counterclockwise circle, while your right arm completed a clockwise circle. The only muscle strength used is on the raising portion of the arm movement; the descending portion is just a release and let go. As your arms move up, straighten your legs, being careful to not lock your knees. As your arms release downward, bend your legs just a bit, loading them for the next bounce up. After a couple of repetitions, the bounce alone should be strong enough to raise your arms. Repeat these circles, windmilling your arms twelve times in this direction. Then reverse direction, arms going down the centerline and up the sides, for another twelve times.

This should be a fairly brisk exercise; each circle should take no more than one second. Feel for the weight of your arms creating a traction at your shoulders through the full arc of the circle. The traction should have an elastic feel, with more of a stretch out at the bottom of the circle regardless of direction, with a slight elastic pull back near the top of each circle. This will create a pumping action within the shoulder joint and Shoulder's Nest, very beneficial for the lymph glands in your armpits, providing lubrication for the shoulder joint, and a relaxing stretch for all the muscles of the shoulder girdle.

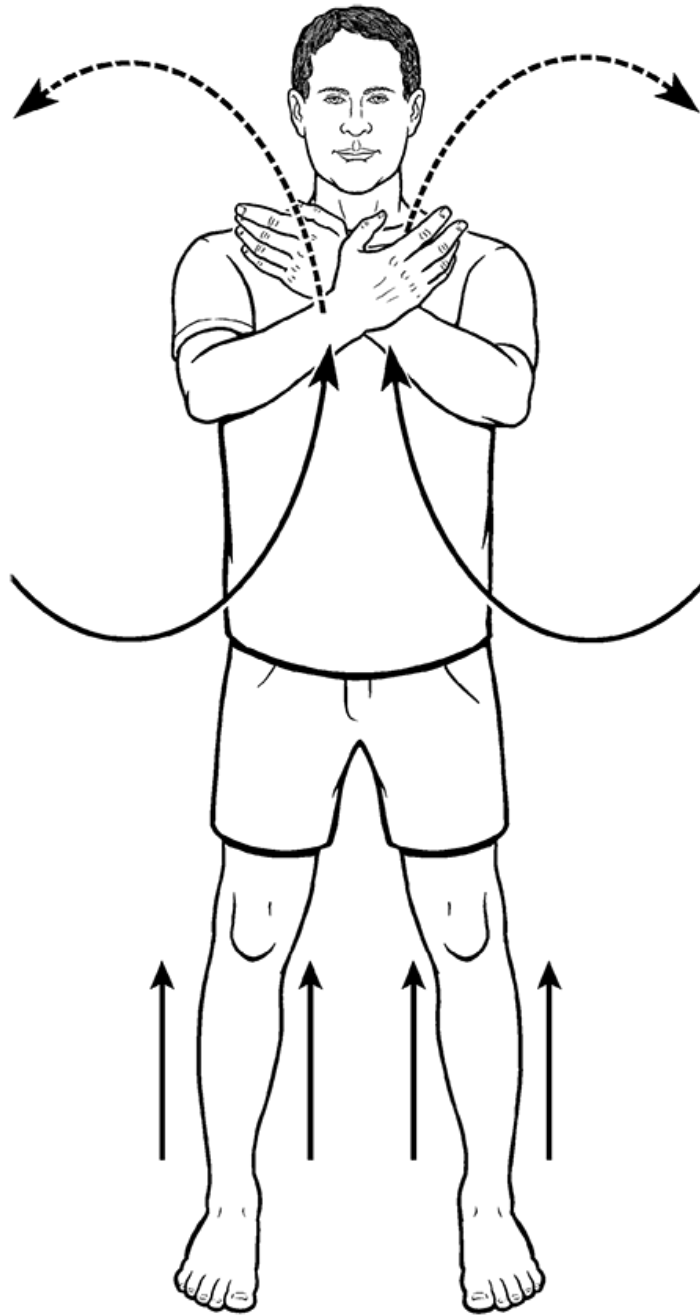


Figure 5.6A (Shoulder/Arm Windmills)

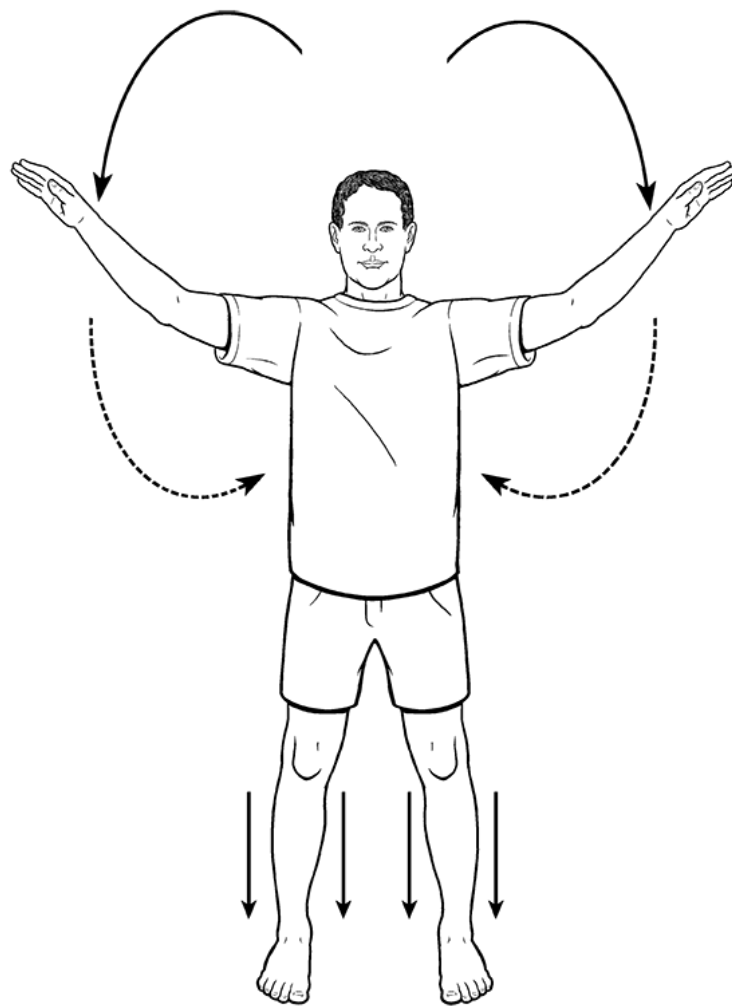


Figure 5.6B (Shoulder/Arm Windmills)

8. Full Arm Rotation for Elbow and Shoulderblades

Elbows can develop problems from overuse, injury, or aging, but they are more challenging to address in isolation. Except in direct self-massage, they are usually addressed as part of an exercise that includes other purposes. That is true of this exercise and the next, but together they are very useful in helping the elbows.

Purpose

Physical: Puts the elbow through its entire range of motion, including flexion (bending), extension (straightening), and rotation. Moves the shoulderblades through their range of motion, including protraction (away from the spine) and retraction (toward the spine), which produces a small rotary motion in the blades as well. As in the previous exercise, this pumps the shoulder blades forward, toward the rib cage, and rearward, away from the rib cage, massaging and stretching the subscapularis muscles, often a hidden source of shoulder and upper back pain. Creates a rotational stretch through all the arm muscles, releasing tension from the nerves and improving blood circulation.

Energetic: Stimulates qi flow through all the Arm meridians (Lung, Large Intestine, Heart, Small Intestine, Pericardium, and Sanjiao, benefiting all those organs) and the entire arm, with a special focus on the arm He Sea points, found around the elbow. While providing a calming effect on the mind, the Sea points mainly treat intestinal problems.

The Yang Arm Sea points additionally treat problems associated with the shoulders, neck, and face.

Techniques used

Conventional and rotational stretch, active joint mobilization.

Method

Standing with feet approximately shoulders width apart, hold your arms straight in front of you, the inner edge of your hands touching with palms upward toward the sky, and elbows as close together as you can get them, preferably touching (**Fig 5.7A** on next page). In this position, your shoulder blades will be fully protracted away from your spine, and forward toward your ribcage. Bending your elbows while moving them apart and drawing your shoulder blades toward your spine, point your fingers toward the sky. While getting into this position, simultaneously rotate your arms, keeping the edge of your hands touching. The backs of your hands move closer together, at about a 45-degree angle at this point (**Fig 5.7B**). Spread your elbows their widest while continuing to rotate your arms so that the backs of your hands fully come together as your fingers point directly to the center of your chest (**Fig 5.7C**). Here, your shoulder blades are fully retracted toward your spine and rearward away from your ribcage.



Figures 5.7A and 5.7B (Full Arm Rotation for Elbow and Shoulderblades)

Continue to rotate your arms as you begin to both spread your shoulder blades and straighten your elbows. Your fingertips point toward the ground as the backs of your hands part to about 45 degrees, hands still touching along the index finger edge (**Fig 5.7D**). Finally, as you continue to rotate your arms, palms face the sky with the little finger edge of your hands touching. Simultaneously, fully straighten—but do not lock—your elbows, and bring them together as your arms fully extend, shoulder blades fully protracted and forward toward your ribcage, and you return to your starting position (**Fig 5.7A**). This completes one full repetition of the exercise.



Figure 5.7C (Full Arm Rotation for Elbow and Shoulderblades)



Figure 5.7D (Full Arm Rotation for Elbow and Shoulderblades)

Get the movement to flow smoothly. Your arms should always be rotating, your hands should always remain in contact, and your elbows should come into contact (or as close as possible) whenever you return to or pass through the starting position. Do your best to keep your shoulders from lifting toward your ears throughout. That keeps the focus of the shoulder movement within the shoulder blade region. There is no set number of repetitions for this exercise. Work on it until you get completely comfortable with it (may take a few weeks), and then do it as long as you like until your arms, shoulders, upper back, and neck feel more open and relaxed. As with all the exercises here, there should never be a sense of strain or overwork during or after the exercise.

Notice that in this variation, you've done 25 percent of your arm rotation during the first 180-degree arc, from where your hands are palm up in front of you through where the backs of your hands are together with fingertips pointing toward your chest. The remaining 75 percent of the arm rotation occurs during the second 180-degree arc as you return to starting position. While you have to rotate your arms faster during the second half, this is a slightly easier variation, better for someone who is unfamiliar with these types of body movements and therefore whose body is probably less open. With some practice, as you become more familiar and your body opens more fully, you can try a second variation. The only difference here is that the arm rotation fully matches the bending and stretching of the arms so that when your fingertips are pointed toward your

chest, your palms again face fully upward. The difference is that when your arms are straight in front of you, the index finger sides of your hands are together, and when your fingertips are facing your chest, the little finger side of your hands are together.

Tip: Advanced practitioners familiar with neigong can add two more components for markedly increased benefit. A spinal C curve can be added to the arm movement, so that the spine is curved when arms are extended in front of you, and straightens as the fingertips point toward your chest. Add reverse breathing, inhaling as the spine curves, exhaling as it straightens. This markedly increases the gapping of the vertebrae, stretches the spinal cord to improve its elasticity and discharge nerve tension, strongly massages the internal organs, increases benefit to the Heart and Lungs, and increases qi and blood circulation through the arms, back, and spine. **Caution:** Do not attempt this variation unless you have neigong training specifically in the C curve and reverse breathing. They are not practices that can be safely and accurately learned from a book or video.

9. Kneeling Forearm Stretch

Purpose

Physical: This is one of the few stretches that targets the forearms, lengthening those muscles. Additionally, this opens the hands and fingers. Most of the hand and finger muscles attach somewhere in the forearm, so the stretches are mutually supportive. Almost all daily activities involve grasping or otherwise closing the hands, which over time can tighten and shorten the muscles of the hand and forearm. This stretch, opposite to the grasping and closing movements, reverses that tendency.

Energetic: Stimulates qi flow through the forearm portion of the arm meridians, primarily opening the Arm Yin meridians (Lung, Heart, Pericardium), while temporarily closing the Yang meridians (Large and Small Intestines, Sanjiao); opens and stimulates the Ying Spring, Shu Stream, and Jing River points located around the hands and wrists, and the He Sea points around the elbows; energetically benefits the whole body through the Daoist Five Element correspondences with each of the five fingers. See Finger and Hand Exercise 2: Backward Finger Extension and Stretch for more details. Opens the Laogong point at the center of the palms.

Techniques used

Extension and stretch, tissue lengthening, focused breathing.

Method

Kneeling with your knees close together, on a mat or other soft surface to protect your knees, place your hands palm down on the ground, fingers pointing toward you, with the little fingers of each hand touching (**Fig 5.8** on next page). The closer you place your fingertips to your knees, the easier the stretch will be. The farther away, the greater the

stretch and so the greater the difficulty. To begin, place your fingertips very close to your knees, even touching them if you want, with your body leaning forward so that your forearms are perpendicular to the ground. Gradually move your butt to your heels, increasing the stretch in your forearms and hands (**Fig 5.9**). If you can easily sit on your heels, lean forward to your starting position and move your hands farther from your knees. Again, gradually move your butt toward your heels, increasing the forearm stretch. When you reach the current limit of your stretch where it just begins to be uncomfortable, use guided breathing to relax in that posture, releasing the discomfort along with any tension on each exhale. You may find that you can slightly increase the stretch as you become more relaxed. You should not feel like the backs of your wrists are jammed tightly shut, like bone is pressing on bone. If that happens, lean your body forward just enough to open the backs of your wrists a bit while keeping the stretch in your forearms and hands.



Figure 5.8 (Kneeling Forearm Stretch)

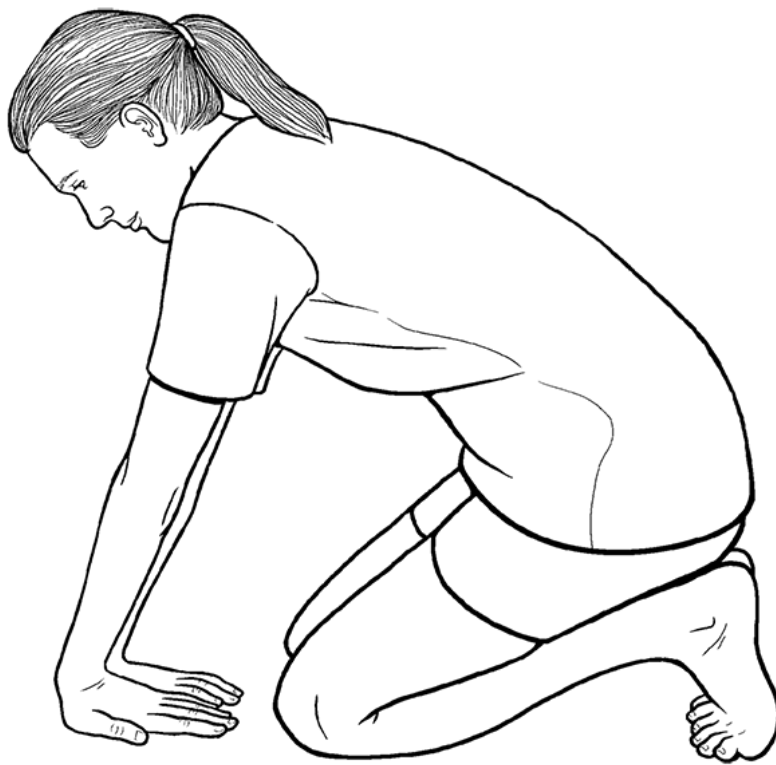


Figure 5.9 (Kneeling Forearm Stretch)

Once you are able to do this stretch comfortably with your fingers a few inches in front of your knees, sitting all the way back on your heels, you can combine this with the seated toe stretches in the Seated Foot exercises section.

10. Prayer Hands Behind Back

Purpose

Physical: This is a continuation of the previous exercise. Initially, you may not be able to do this one, but after practicing the Kneeling Forearm Stretch for some time, it will become easier. The next exercise, Interlocking Fingers behind Back, can also help you with this one, depending on where your particular restriction may be.

The previous exercise addresses the forearm and the entire front of the wrist. This one has a slightly greater focus on the little finger side of the wrist and forearm, in both the muscles and the joints. As such, it is more useful in addressing ulnar nerve problems. This also opens the front of the chest and stretches the front of the shoulders, benefiting the anterior deltoids (front shoulder muscles), the pectoral muscles (upper chest muscles), and the joint spaces where the front of the ribs attach to the sternum (breast bone).

Energetic: Same as for the Kneeling Forearm Stretch. Additionally, this has a stronger focus on the Heart and Small Intestine meridians, providing more of a benefit for those organs and energy systems. Opening the front of the chest in this way, the front of the Shoulder's Nests are opened, and energetically benefits the Lungs. Opening the front of the chest further benefits the heart, and opens the acupuncture point called Tan Zhong, at the center of the chest. That too benefits the Lungs, and positively influences the qi of the entire body.

Techniques used

Extension and stretch, tissue lengthening, Daoist yoga, focused breathing.

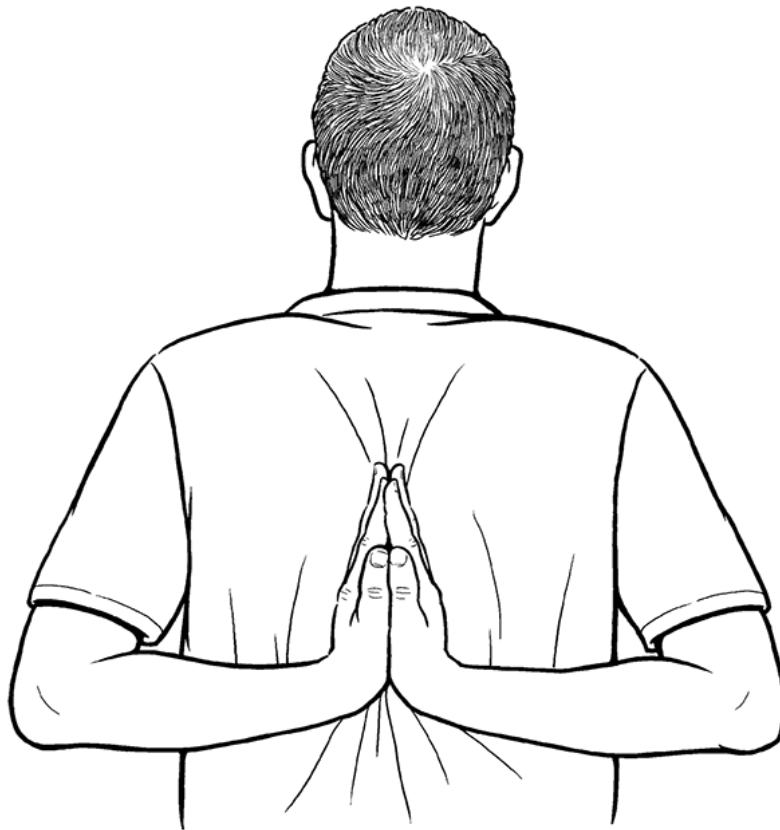


Figure 5.10 (Prayer Hands Behind Back)

Method

Standing, or seated with no back obstructions, place the backs of your hands on your low back, fingertips touching. Keep your fingertips touching, and gradually move your hands up your back. You will naturally begin to point your fingers upward, and move your palms closer together. Your goal is to move your hands high enough up your back so that you can touch your palms together completely, in a prayer position, with the little finger edge of your hands staying in contact with your back (**Fig 5.10**). Once you attain that position, begin focused breathing, breathing into the stretch and releasing any tension you may feel with each exhalation. Gradually increase the stretch by moving your elbows rearward. That will further open the front of your chest and shoulders, and open the little finger edge of your wrists.

11. Interlocking Fingers behind Back—A Shoulder Stretch

Purpose

Physical: Opens the front of the shoulders, provides a rotational stretch to access muscles that are more difficult to stretch in other ways.

Energetic: Opens the Shoulder's Nests, benefits the Lungs, releases local channel obstruction (shoulder pain from qi and blood stagnation). Opens the armpit (the bottom portion of the Shoulder's Nests), benefits the Heart. The external portion of the Heart

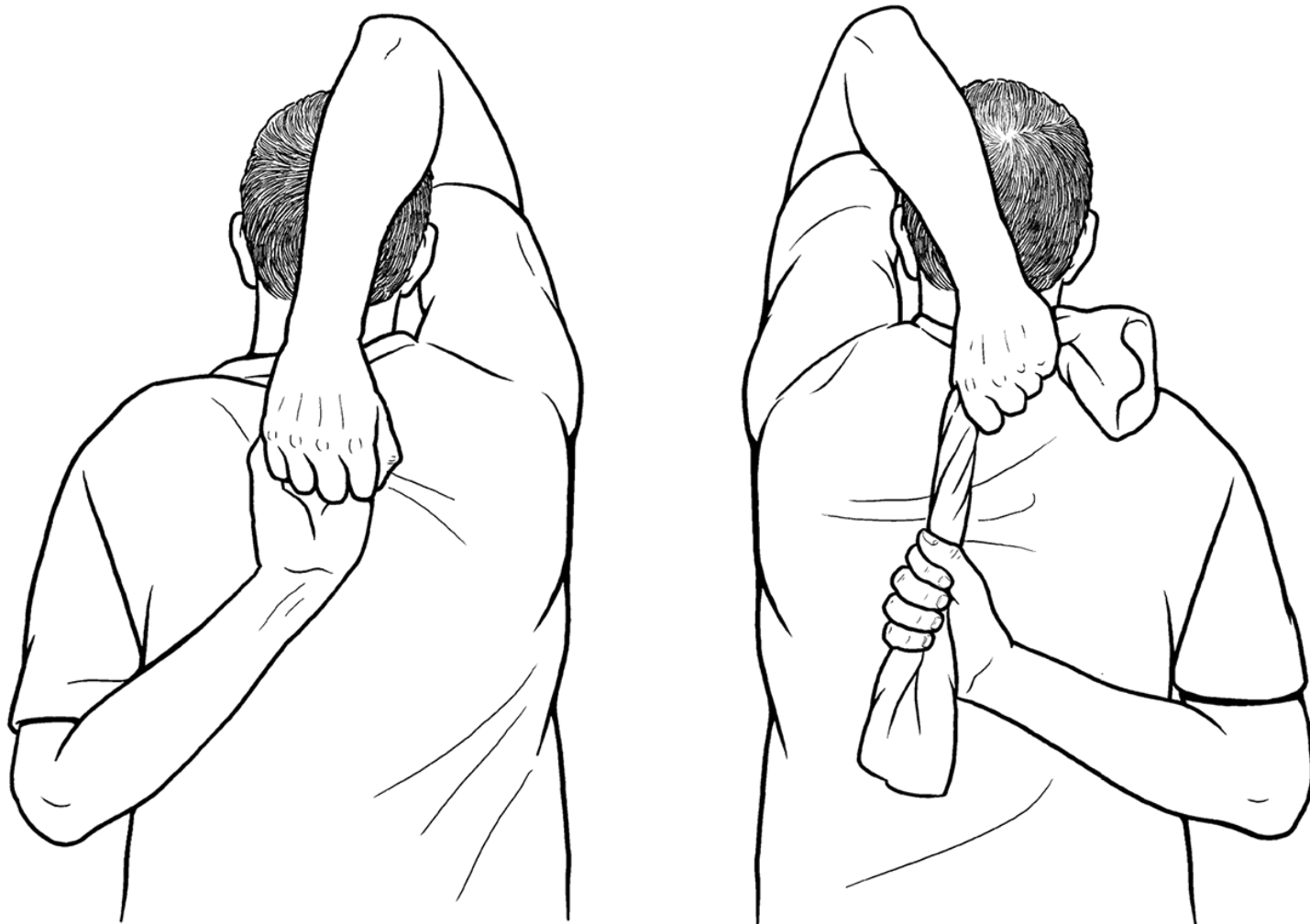
meridian enters the torso at the center of the armpit.

Techniques used

Standard stretch, rotational stretch, tissue lengthening, Daoist yoga, focused breathing.

Method

Standing, or seated with no back obstructions, place the back of your left hand on your low back, palm facing rearward. Keeping the back of your hand in contact with your back, move it upward as high as possible so that your fingertips point upward toward the sky, or as close as you can get to that. Hold your right arm straight up, by the right side of your head, fingers pointing to the sky. Then bend your right elbow so that your hand can reach behind your back, palm touching your back, with your right elbow now pointing upward. If the fingertips of each hand can touch, curl the fingers of each hand into hooks, so they interlock (**Fig 5.11**). This will pull your left arm higher up your back, increasing the stretch to the front of your left shoulder and the rotational stretch inside the shoulder joint. There will also be an increased stretch in your right armpit and along the right triceps.



Figures 5.11 and 5.12 (Interlocking Fingers behind Back—A Shoulder Stretch)

Variation: If your fingertips can't touch behind your back, use this variation. Hold a

small towel (or a belt or short length of rope) in your right hand. As you reach behind your back with your right hand, grab the towel firmly with your left. Pull up on the towel with your left arm, “choking up” on the towel as you do, so that the length of towel between your hands becomes less. Hold the stretch once you’ve increased it to your current comfortable limit (**Fig 5.12**).

With the stretch held with interlocked fingers or a towel, begin directed breathing into the stretch. Do your best to let any feeling of tension release with each exhale. If you are using a towel, hold the stretch for at least thirty seconds, and gradually increase the amount of time as your body opens more fully. If you have your fingers interlocked, you can hold the stretch longer from the start, for up to two minutes.

12. Nerve and Meridian Stretch/Release

Purpose (Physical and Energetic)

Heart disease is one of the major killers in the United States and other developed countries. This exercise both brings an increased awareness into body parts related to heart health (associated meridians and nerves) and gives people a tool, a way to use that awareness to reverse some of the contributing factors to heart disease. A common symptom of heart attack, for example, is the sensation of pain running down the left arm, and often also the right arm. This symptom is universally observed and agreed upon by medical professionals. Less well-known by most people: that arm pathway corresponds to the external portion of the Heart meridian, which is used to treat Heart problems of various descriptions. Keeping that meridian open, freely transporting qi through its length, is necessary to maintaining heart health, and may prevent the occurrence of some heart diseases.

Unlike other stretches presented here, this one does not directly target muscles, although they are influenced to some degree. Here the stretch focuses on nerve and meridian pathways, and on fascia (the tough, thin membranous tissue that surrounds muscles and organs), particularly the palmar aponeurosis covering the palm of the hand. While qi has some specific trajectories, traveling along discrete meridian pathways, it also travels freely and diffusely through all other parts of the body. The fascia provides a layer of physical tissue for one such diffuse network. The sensation of stretched nerve and fascia is very different than that of muscles, and this gives you one access point to that distinction.

Techniques used

Nerve and fascia stretch, nerve and qi awareness/sensitization, focused breathing.

Method

Stand facing an unobstructed wall, about an arm’s length away from it. To stretch your left arm, turn your whole body 90 degrees to the right, so that your left shoulder is now

toward the wall. Raise your left arm and place your palm on the wall, fingers pointing straight up toward the ceiling. Make sure the whole surface of your palm touches the wall, with the possible exception of the concavity at the very center of your palm. Also make sure that your arm is relaxed, and the tip of your elbow is pointing toward the ground and not locked. Use your mind to feel an almost magnetic attraction between your palm and the wall, creating a light sense of attachment so that you don't have to exert any effort to hold your arm up, and so that the weight of your arm does not pull your palm down or off of the wall. You may already feel the effects of the stretch as a light burn at your palm and along the length of your arm.

To increase the stretch, maintain the sense of magnetic attraction between your palm and the wall, and while keeping your body perpendicular to the ground (in other words, don't lean), move very slightly away from the wall, maybe just 1/8 to 1/4 inch. This will remove a bit more slack from your arm, stretching the nerve and meridian pathway (**Fig 5.13**). There should not be a sense of pushing your palm into the wall. It's more like a pulling away, but do not let any part of your palm leave the wall, do not let your elbow lock, and keep your elbow tip pointed toward the ground. Now you should clearly feel a burn at the palm of your hand, along the bottom surface of your arm, or both. That burn is from the nerve and fascia stretch.

Because everyone's physiology is slightly different, you may need to roll your arm so that your elbow tip points a little toward the front or rear of your body, but only just a little, and while continuing to keep your palm fully contacting the wall. Only do this in order to increase the burn sensation if it is not already present, and that will indicate that you are now in fact stretching the nerve and fascia. Once you have the burn, hold the stretch for up to two minutes, breathing slowly and deeply while encouraging your arm to relax further with each exhalation. In previous stretches, the breath-directed relaxation primarily targeted tight muscles. Here, it is targeting the nerve and fascia.

To stretch your right arm, lower your left arm from the wall, turn to the left so that your right shoulder is now facing the wall, and repeat the above with your right arm.

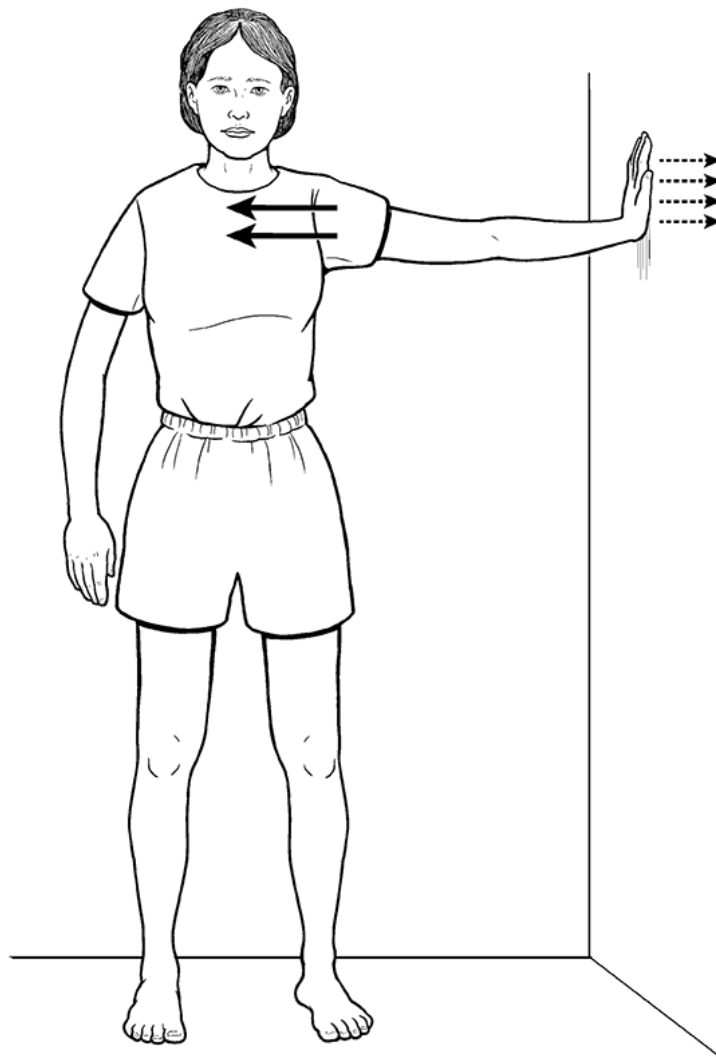


Figure 5.13 (Nerve and Meridian Stretch/Release)

[contents]

Six

Back, Pelvis/Hips, and Spine

Our back is one of the most important external parts of our body, and is often the most overlooked—until it hurts. Relative to the front of the body—which is softer, more vulnerable, and allows easier access to most internal organs—the back is tougher, harder, and more protective, both physically and energetically. This is in keeping with the Chinese understanding that the back of the body is more Yang, while the front of the body is more Yin. In Western understanding, this is expressed colloquially when someone is feeling weak or frightened and may want to “curl up in a ball” or “revert to a fetal position.” When one is physically under assault by an animal or some other attacker they may be unable to fight against, curling up in a ball is a natural self-protective response to that danger.

The vertebrae (the bones of the spinal column) are dense bones, and their rounded structure effectively shields the soft spinal cord within. At the rear of each vertebra is a protrusion called the spinous process, the bony tip of the vertebra which is what is felt along the center of the back. In addition to being an attachment point for various muscles, the spinous process provides an extra measure of protection against any force that may strike the back. Tough ligaments “knit” the vertebrae together, providing greater flexible stability. Between each two vertebrae are cartilaginous discs, tough on the surface and springy on the inside, to provide cushioning and shock absorption between vertebrae. Dense muscles flank the vertebral column, and broad dense muscles cover the entire back and ribcage; both provide further structural support and create motion in every plane. Each rib also articulates with (touches and attaches to) the sides of the vertebrae, and there are muscles and cartilage between each rib. While just a very general description of the structure of the back, this should give you a good idea of its protective design.

Within the vertebral column is the spinal cord, the nervous system’s main “information superhighway,” allowing the brain to communicate with virtually everything in the body. Spinal nerves exit the spinal cord between each vertebra, sending functional information to every part of the body to make sure every organ, muscle, and other body tissues are working properly. They also receive sensory information so the subconscious, automatic

parts of the brain can make appropriate decisions based on what the body has to report about itself and the environment, and they inform our conscious mind so we can actively make the best choices for ourselves.

On a purely energetic level, the Du meridian, or Governing Vessel, runs upward behind the center of the spine, and governs all the Yang aspects of the body, fully one-half of all body processes and activities. Along the Du meridian are numerous conventional acupuncture points, some of which correspond to various developmental stages of the trajectory of one's life, more of a spiritual consideration. At the center of the top of the head, there is a point on the Du meridian called Bai Hui, or "One-hundred Convergences," both a direct and an indirect meeting point for all the most prominent energy lines in the body. These are just a couple of ways to demonstrate the influence of the Du meridian, which extends much farther throughout both the physical and the spirit body than you might expect, and includes many aspects of mental functioning.

Flanking the spine are two branches of the Urinary Bladder (UB) meridian, the inner branch being about 1 1/2 inches from the center of the spine, and the outer branch being about 3 inches out. The inner branch of the UB meridian has points which influence the function of every internal organ, including the respiratory diaphragm. Those points almost entirely correspond to the locations of the spinal nerves that influence the same organs. The outer UB line contains points that influence the emotional energies associated with the various organs, and some have a connection with spiritual energies too.

From this you can see how the health of the back and spine influences the health of the entire body. If an injury causes a muscle spasm or damage to a vertebra or disc, or inactivity causes increasingly tight back muscles and spinal compression and those or any number of other possible back problems go uncorrected, much of the life energy at those points is shut off. Degeneration sets in, and aging is accelerated. According to Chinese medicine, the Kidneys, which reside in the low back, are responsible for much of our vitality, sexual energy, the health of all the bones in the body (including the teeth), aspects of hearing, and the manifestation and condition of head hair, as well as the commonly understood functions associated with detoxification and fluid metabolism as regulated through the urinary tract. These are all things we see commonly affected by age. In the context of the exercises presented in this book, taking care of your back may be the single most important thing you can do to stay healthy and vital, and slow the aging process.

1. Torso Twist with Arm Swing

Purpose (Physical and Energetic)

This exercise is a convenient linking exercise with the previous arm and shoulder set, but may be practiced at the very beginning of an exercise session to warm up and vitalize much of the entire body, or can be done at any time as a stand-alone exercise as a

general tonic and antidote to too much sitting. With practice, you can use it to “pump” and massage the inguinal lymph glands, benefiting the immune system. It is often used as a warm-up before doing a taiji set. Some people may recognize this as similar to the First Arm Swing of the Three Arm Swings of the Energy Gates qigong set, but it is not the same thing. This version is simpler, does not contain the neigong aspects of the First Arm Swing, but does offer more benefit to all the physical structures of the back. By extension, the energetics discussed in the introduction to this section are also benefited. All of the vertical acupuncture meridians of the back (Du and UB) and core meridians are stimulated, as well as the horizontal Dai meridian. Paidagong, slapping and patting, additionally dislodges stagnant qi around the kidneys and low back. When done vigorously, it is also a very safe zero-impact aerobic exercise.

Techniques used

Joint mobilization of the spine and shoulders; stretching of most of the torso muscles, legs, and arms; induction of qi through all of the meridians; paidagong.

Method

Stand with your feet parallel, slightly wider than shoulder width apart. Make sure there is no furniture, person, or any other type of obstruction within extended arms’ length. Imagine a pole running perpendicularly through the center of your body, and turn your torso around that pole, first to one side and then the other. Keep your arms completely relaxed, hanging loose at your sides (**Fig 6.1A**). Stay perpendicular to the ground; do not lean from side to side. Feel the vertebrae rotate over each other and the attached back muscles stretch as you turn. The muscles around your waist will also stretch with the twist. Turn your head in the same direction as your torso so that your neck also fully pivots around that center pole. Try to look at the wall directly behind you by the endpoint of the turn in both directions (**Fig 6.1B** and **Fig 6.1C**). Gradually turn faster so that your relaxed arms raise from the motion of the turn only. Do not use any effort to raise your arms.

If you want, you may increase the power of the turn by shifting your weight to your left leg as you turn left, and then to your right leg as you turn right, still without leaning. That may give you a sense of springiness in your legs as you turn side to side, and blood flow through your legs will increase. If you are able to feel that, you are also massaging the inguinal lymph glands, benefiting your entire immune system. As you turn faster and with more power, your arms will raise higher. Your hands will begin to slap and tap your body, starting at your thighs and hips, but in time and with practice, they’ll rise to the height of your low back and the top of your pelvis. The tapping and patting should feel comfortable, not forced, hard, or painful.

There’s no set amount of time to do this. As a warm-up, or contained within an exercise

set, one to two minutes can be enough, although longer is fine. If you do this as a stand-alone practice, you may want to do it for five minutes or more. Let your senses be your guide. At the completion of the Torso Twist, your back, waist, and arms should feel loose, energized, open, and relaxed.

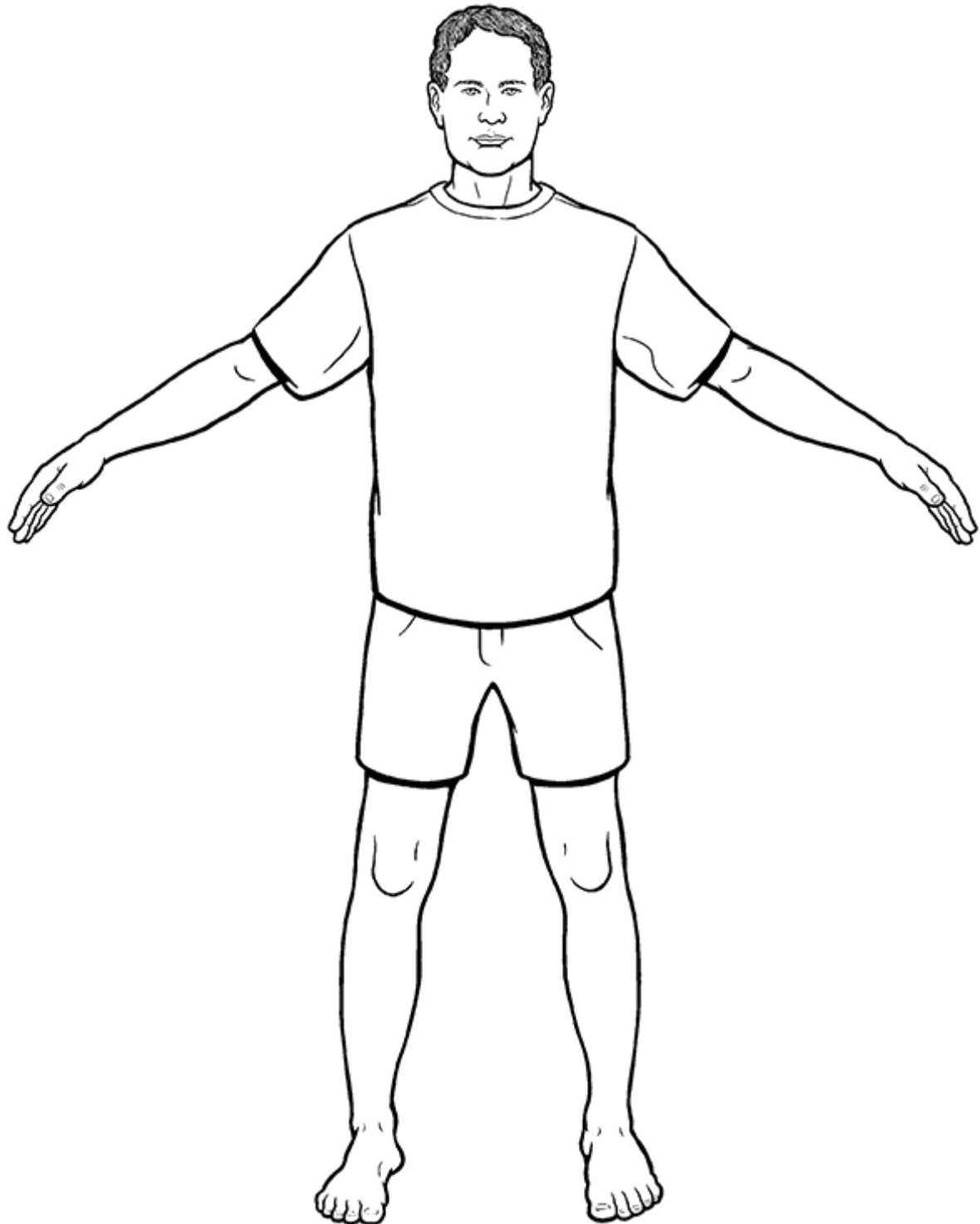
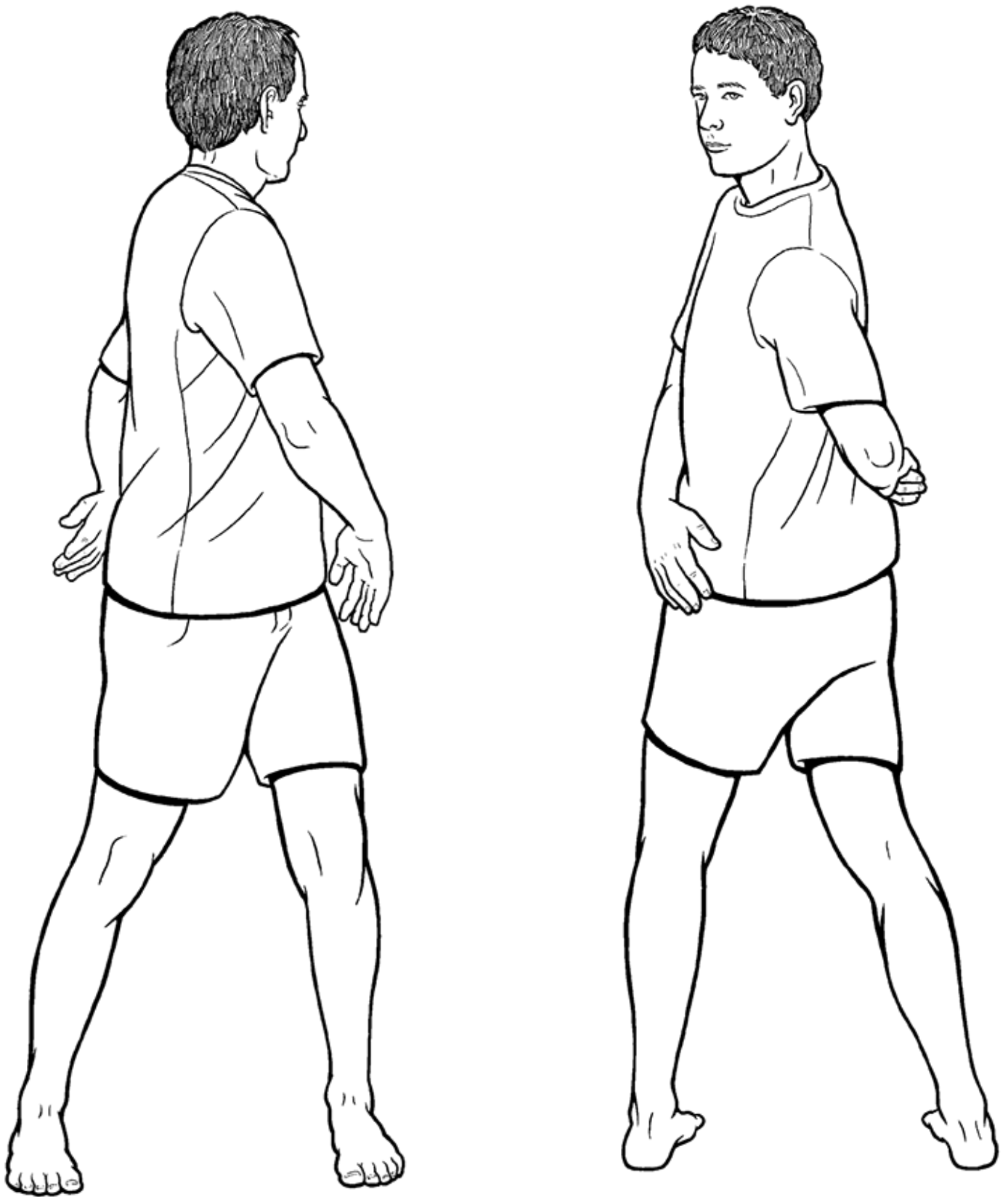


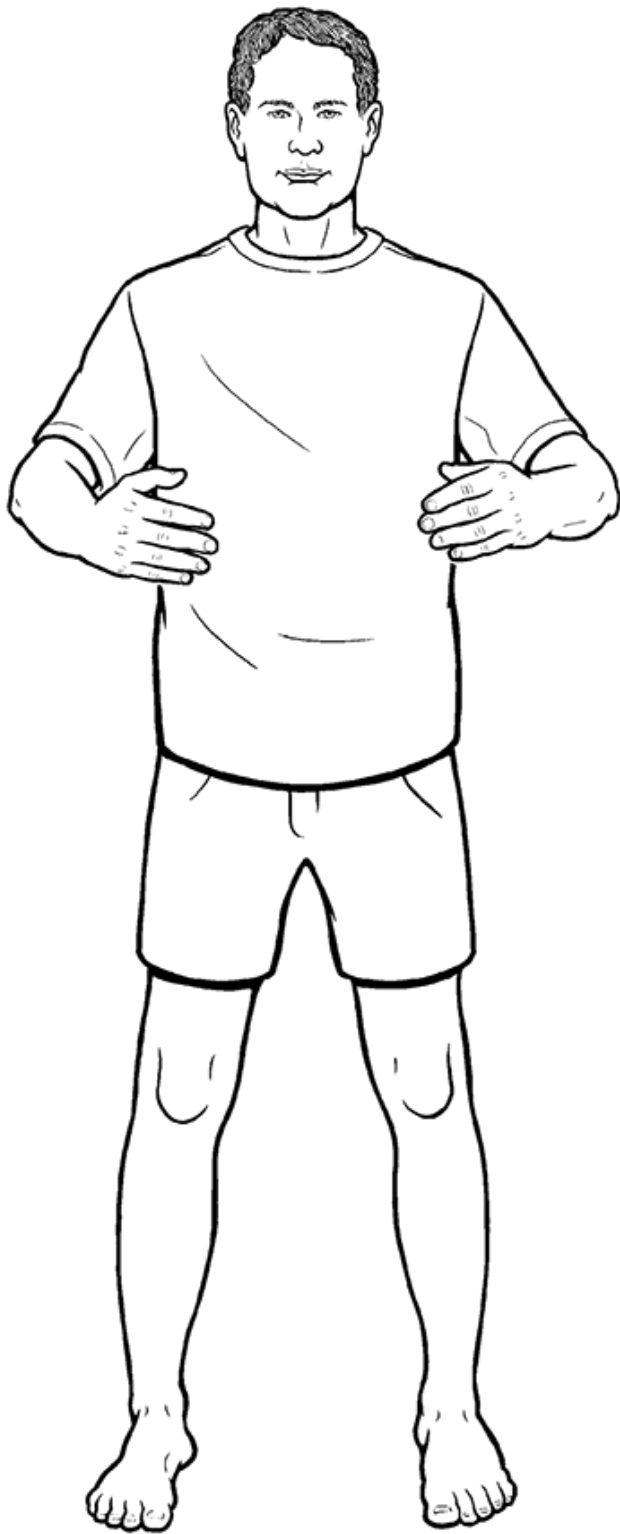
Figure 6.1A (Torso Twist with Arm Swing)



Figures 6.1B and 6.1C (Torso Twist with Arm Swing)

Variations

Variation One: Hug a Tree and Lead with Elbows: In this variation of the Torso Twist, you can target select vertebrae that may feel particularly stuck or tight, if they fall between the range of the height of your shoulders and elbows when your arms are at your sides. Otherwise, the purpose and techniques used are the same as in the primary version. Most of the method is the same except as follows.



Figures 6.2A and 6.2B (Torso Twist with Arm Swing)

Hold your arms in front of you as though hugging a tree. Hold them at the height of the tight area of your back that you want to target most (**Fig 6.2A**). As above, stay perpendicular to the ground, and turn from side to side, pivoting around your centerline. The difference here is that you want to lead the turn with your elbows, as though you were jabbing someone behind you, so as you turn to the left, lead with your left elbow, and then with your right as you turn to the right (**Fig 6.2B**). Try to maintain the sense of hugging the tree, so that your hands and arms don't collapse in toward your body much. The weight of your arms alone is enough to add to the torque in your spine at the

targeted vertebral segments, so don't use much force with the backward jab of your elbow. Feel free to experiment with your arms' height level until you find what feels best to you. Even though you can't lower your arms below the height of your elbows in this exercise, at that lowest point it will also increase the twist in your low back, allowing you somewhat more access to that region too. You may feel or hear cracks and pops in your back, just as in a chiropractic adjustment. That's normal and should not be cause for alarm.

Variation Two: Hug a Tree with Qigong Energetics, for Daimai: The Daimai, or girdling or belt meridian, is the only one which has a horizontal trajectory around the torso. It intersects all the Twelve Regular meridians, and the remaining seven of the Eight Extraordinary meridians, being the eighth itself. One of its functions is to bind and stabilize all the other meridians, and in that capacity it has a positive effect on the entire body. It also intersects the Dantian in the front of the body, and the kidneys and the Mingmen at the rear of the body. All the extraordinary meridians serve as reservoirs of Qi and Blood. Due in part to its location and intersections, the Daimai influences all reproductive health, and plays a particularly beneficial role in gynecological health.

Practice this variation only after you have some success practicing Dragon Playing with a Pearl, in chapter 11. It will only have noticeable beneficial effect if you can make a tangible qi connection between your hands and your torso, and Dragon Playing with a Pearl will help you to cultivate that ability.

Here you will begin as in the first variation above, and will place your arms in front of you as though hugging a tree, with this difference: start with your hands as far away from your body as possible, with your palms facing you at the height of your Dantian, just a little below your belly button. Gradually move them closer to your belly, until you feel a distinct energetic connection from your palms to your torso. That energetic connection should feel very much the same as the one you made between your palms when practicing Dragon Playing with a Pearl. This one is more challenging than feeling the qi between your palms only, so be patient and be honest with yourself as to what you are feeling.

Keep your torso perpendicular to the ground, and turn from side to side, slowly pivoting around your centerline. Try to maintain the sense of hugging the tree, so that your hands and arms don't collapse in toward your body, and keep the distance between your fingers as uniform as possible as you turn. You won't be leading with your elbows here. More importantly, maintain the sense of energetic connection from your hands to your torso. Your palms should trace the trajectory of your Daimai at the front portion of your body only, from just above one hip to the other hip, or as near as you can get.

As you turn to the right, slightly cup the palm of your right hand, pulling your qi through the Daimai to the right, as you slightly straighten your left palm, pushing your qi to the

right. Reverse that as you turn to the left. Do this in each direction as many times as you'd like. This will smooth and harmonize qi flow through your Daimai, and will engender a feeling of peacefulness and be calmly energizing. If you're working to remedy a reproductive or gynecological problem, fifteen or twenty minutes a day is recommended.

2. Pelvic Tilt (Forward and Back)

Purpose

Physical: Releases tension in the low back muscles; mobilizes the lumbar vertebrae, increases blood flow to and around the kidneys.

Energetic: Frees qi obstruction in the lower Du meridian and the Mingmen (reducing low back pain from qi and blood stagnation); promotes qi flow through the Du, Ren, and Dai meridians; benefits the Kidneys.

Techniques used

Stretching, joint mobilization, focused breathing.

Method

Stand with your feet parallel, shoulder width apart. Feet parallel is especially important in this exercise, as low back tension frequently causes feet to splay outward at the toes. If you keep your feet parallel, you will increase the stretch exactly on those tight areas of your low back.



Figure 6.3 (Pelvic Tilt—Forward and Back)

Optionally, and a good idea for the first few times you try this at least, place your hands on the sides of your hips, so that your little fingers are at or slightly above the crest of your hipbones, fingertips forward. Spread your thumbs to your back, so that the pads and tips of the thumbs are just below your lowest ribs, as close to your spine as they can naturally reach. Your thumbs are now in a position to be a landmark to assist you in doing this exercise optimally (**Fig 6.3**).

Slowly inhale deep into your belly, and as you do so, tilt your pelvis so that your tailbone moves forward, stretching and opening the back of your low spine (**Fig 6.4A**). If you can get the pressure from your breath to reach your lower belly, that will increase the stretch in your low back. Try to keep the stretch confined to the region below your thumbs, from their tips down to your tailbone. While it's not bad or dangerous to allow the portion of your back higher than your thumbs to move, it can easily minimize the amount of stretch in your lower back, which is the particular focus of this exercise. On an exhalation, tilt your pelvis in the opposite direction, moving your tailbone and your butt rearward, again doing your best to confine the motion to the region below your thumbs (**Fig 6.4B**). This will increase the natural concave curve of your lumbar spine. Repeat this at least ten times, but after that you can continue for as long as you'd like.

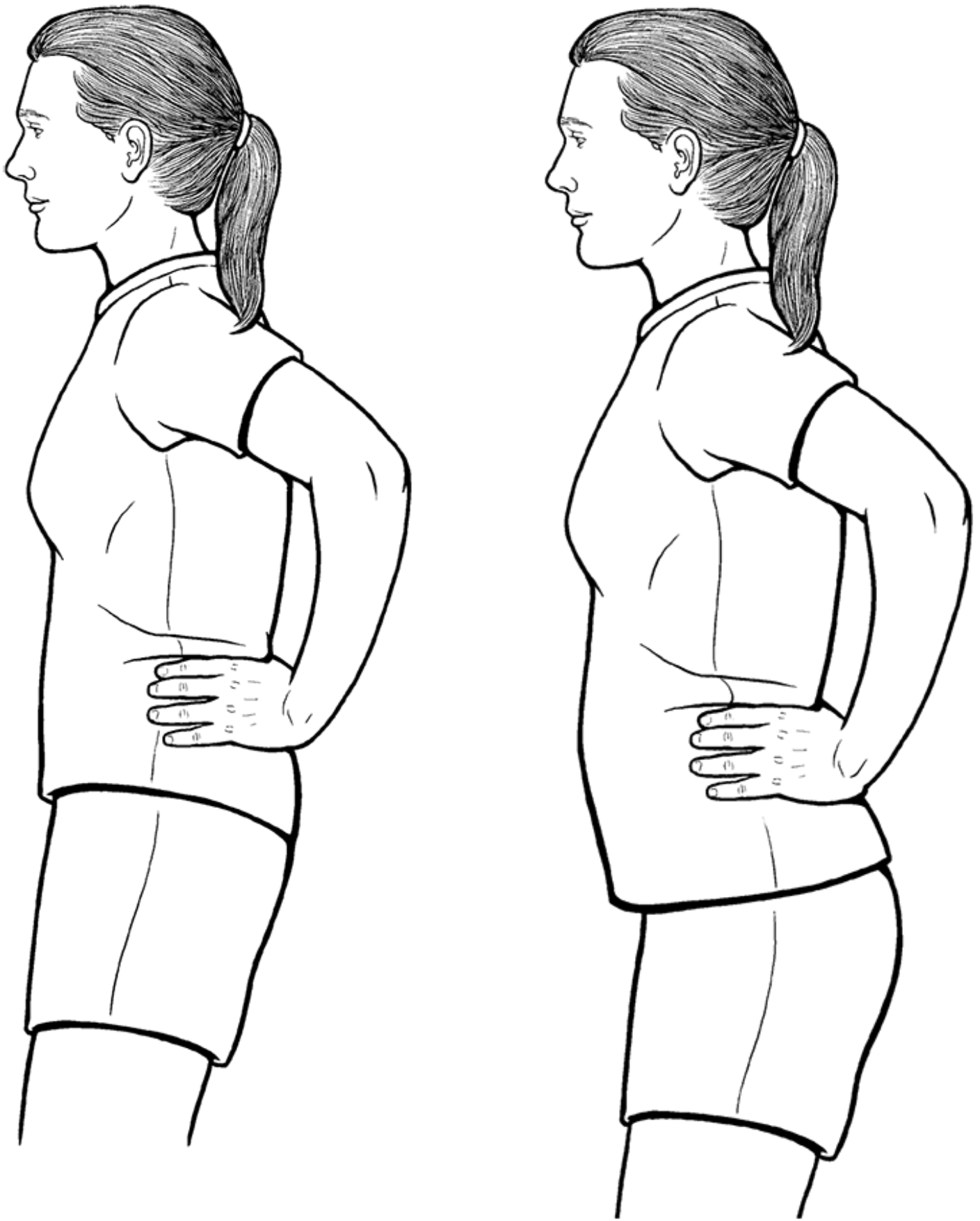


Figure 6.4A and 6.4B (Pelvic Tilt —Forward and Back)

If your low back is particularly tight, as is true for many people, you may feel or even hear crackling in your low back during this exercise, and as your back opens more over time, you may even feel or hear a vertebra snap or pop, like getting a spinal adjustment. In the absence of pain, this is normal, beneficial, and nothing to be alarmed by.

3. Hula Rolls

Purpose

Physical: As a continuation of what came before, while introducing new planes of motion, it will release tension in the low back muscles, mobilize the lumbar vertebrae, and increase blood flow to and around the kidneys.

Energetic: Frees qi obstruction in the lower Du meridian and the Mingmen (reducing low back pain from qi and blood stagnation); promotes qi flow through the Du, Ren, and Dai meridians; benefits the kidneys.

Techniques used

Stretching, joint mobilization, focused breathing.

Method

Stand with your feet parallel, shoulder width apart or slightly wider. If you keep your feet parallel, you will increase the stretch exactly on the tightest, most restricted areas of your low back. Optionally, place your hands on the sides of your hips, so that your little fingers are at or slightly above the crest of your hipbones, fingertips forward. Spread your thumbs to your back, so that the pads and tips of the thumbs are just below your lowest ribs, as close to your spine as they can naturally reach. Your thumbs are now in a position to be a landmark to assist you in doing this exercise optimally. Keep everything above your thumbs as still as possible, and only move everything below your thumbs.

Similarly to a hula dancer, slowly circle your hips in clockwise circles (**Fig 6.5**). See if there are any parts of that circle that feel stuck or unable to circle as smoothly as the rest of the circle. That indicates an area of restriction that needs more attention, so if necessary, slow your circles even further to smoothly get through the stuck areas. After a minimum of twelve, circle as long as you like, enough for your back to begin to feel more open and comfortable, and then repeat in counterclockwise circles for the same amount of time.

In this exercise, your breath does not need to coordinate with the movement. It should be a full breath, though, slow and deep into your belly. Do your best to keep it completely smooth on the inhale and the exhale, with no gaps, no held breath, at any time. The smoother and more “circular” you make your breath, the smoother and freer your physical hula circles will be.



Figure 6.5 (Hula Rolls)

4. Yin-Yang Side Bend

The name of this exercise comes both from its purpose, opening and harmonizing various Yin and Yang meridians, and from the image used to help perform it best, that of rotating a large taiji (yin yang) mandala between your arms.

Purpose

Physical: Strongly stretches the muscles between the sides of the upper pelvis and lowest ribs; stretches the sides of the intercostal muscles (between the ribs); laterally flexes and extends the entire vertebral column, stretching the related small internal muscles, tendons, and ligaments. Massages the sides of the liver and spleen, and benefits the lungs.

Energetic: Opens and stimulates the Gall Bladder meridian, energetically benefiting the Liver, Gall Bladder, tendons and ligaments. Frees the Du and urinary bladder meridians. Additionally, the arm movements help open the Yin and Yang Arm meridians of the Heart, Lungs, Pericardium, Small and Large Intestines, and Sanjiao/Triple Burner.

Techniques used

Stretching, joint mobilization, visualization, focused breathing.

Method

Stand with your feet parallel, slightly wider than shoulder-width apart. Raise your arms out to your sides, imagining that you are holding a large Yin-Yang mandala between your hands, somewhat like a very large ball. Try to feel the connection between your hands, even at that distance apart (**Fig 6.6A**). With the sense that you are rolling your hands around the surface of the large ball, raise your right arm straight up over your head so that your palm is more or less facing the center of the top of your head, with your fingertips pointing left. Try to keep your shoulder lowered so that it does not approach your right ear. Your elbow should point toward the right, creating just a slight bowing of your arm. Simultaneously place your left hand in front of you, palm facing up on the midline of your body, at about the height of your pubic bone. The tip of your left elbow should point toward the ground in front of the left side of your body.

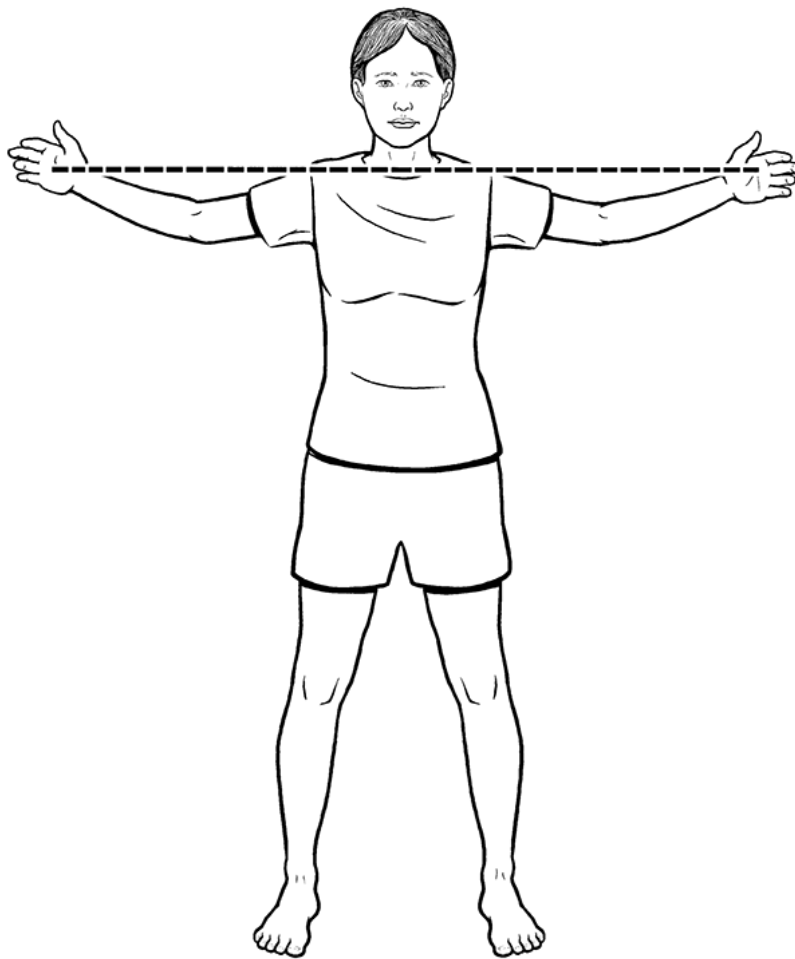


Figure 6.6A (Yin-Yang Side Bend)

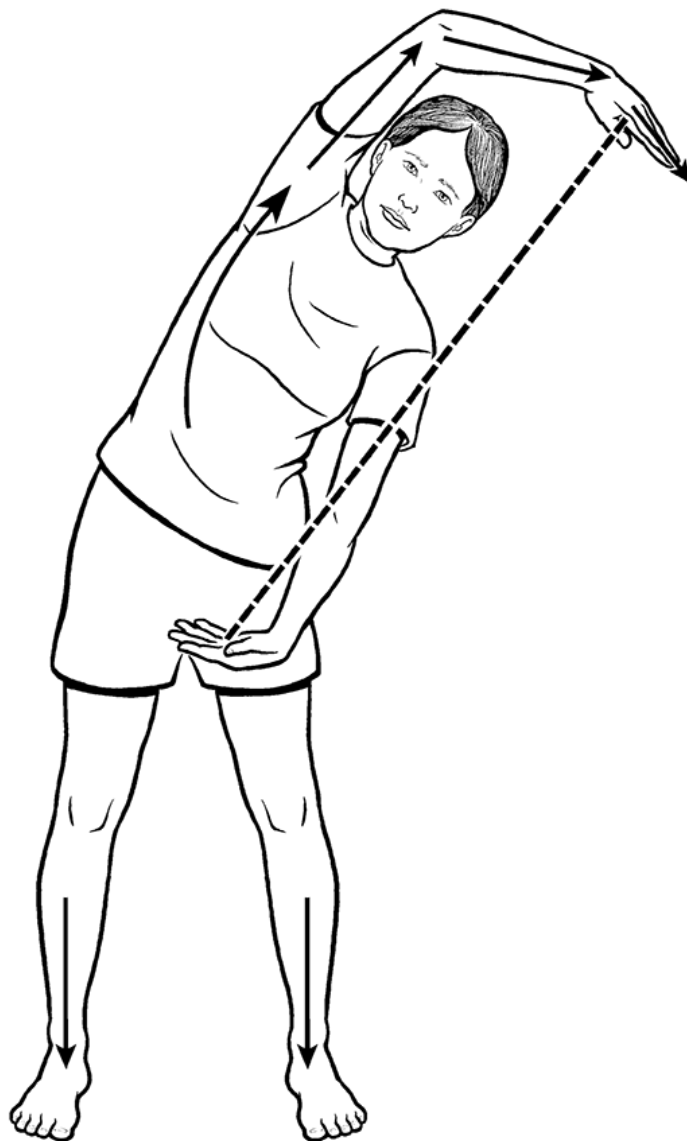


Figure 6.6B (Yin-Yang Side Bend)

Without bending or leaning forward or backward, bend to the left primarily from the left side of your waist, rotating the mandala counterclockwise to the left as you do so. Your left hand will move toward (or possibly past) the front of your right hip, while your left hand moves well beyond the left side of your head (**Fig 6.6B**). Because you are holding the large taiji ball, your hands and arms will not collapse or come any closer together than they were in your starting position. If you allow them to come any closer together, you will minimize the stretch and minimize the benefit. Feel your arms extending, out of your armpits and all the way beyond your fingertips. Doing that, you will feel the stretch more strongly along the left side of your body. You may feel or hear popping and cracking in your back as the vertebrae open on their sides. That's nothing to be alarmed by, and in fact will make your back feel more comfortable and open, like a chiropractic adjustment. The right side of your body may feel compressed, especially between the side of your pelvis and your lower ribs. That's okay too, and helps to massage your spleen, intestines, and pancreas. You do want to try create some sense of openness there nevertheless, so it doesn't become uncomfortably compressed. Better yet is to feel a springiness, so the compressed side feels like it wants to bounce back open.

Rotate the taiji ball clockwise, to the left, as you return to an upright position. Although you don't stop in the upright position, as you pass through it your arms will be spread to your sides. Continue your bend to the left this time, again from your waist and still making sure you do not lean forward or backward, keeping your arms moving in a clockwise circle. At the end point, your right hand will be more or less palm down and facing your left hand, which is more or less palm up just past your right hip. Still feel for the connection between your palms as though you are holding the large ball. Arms should feel extended out from the armpits all the way beyond the tips of the fingers. Then return to an upright position, and repeat to the right. Do ten to twelve repetitions.

Breathing can be done in one of two ways. If the stretch is very easy for you, inhale as you bend to the side. That will make your lungs and belly expand more, which will increase the stretch both internally and externally. Exhale as you return to an upright position. If the stretch is difficult for you, exhale as you bend to the side. Exhalations always help muscles to relax and release and thus will make the stretch easier for you. Also, less expansion of your lungs and belly will decrease the internal pressurization, again making it easier for you.

Variation

This familiar variation is taken from the Baduanjin Eight Golden Brocades qigong set. The purpose, benefits, and methods are very similar with these exceptions.

Interlock the fingers of both hands together, palms up in front of your low belly. Keep your fingers interlocked throughout. Raise your arms above your head, and turn your hands so the palms are facing the sky. Exert a gentle pressure upward, as though you were trying to push something, but avoid locking your elbows, keep a slight bend in them (**Fig 6.7A**). This increases the stretch through your arms and into your palms. Bend side to side and breathe as instructed above, maintaining the sense of pushing with your interlocked fingers (**Fig 6.7B**).

By having the back of your wrists more closed and the front of your wrists more open, this variation stretches the Yin surfaces of the arms more, increasing qi flow through the Arm Yin meridians of the Heart, Pericardium, and Lungs while decreasing it through the Yang meridians of the Large and Small Intestines and the Sanjiao. You might chose this variation if you know you want to target your heart and lungs more, or want to open the yin surfaces of your arms more. The muscles there tend to constrict with overuse, so the additional stretch may feel better to you. The benefits throughout the legs, torso, and spine are otherwise identical to the primary version.

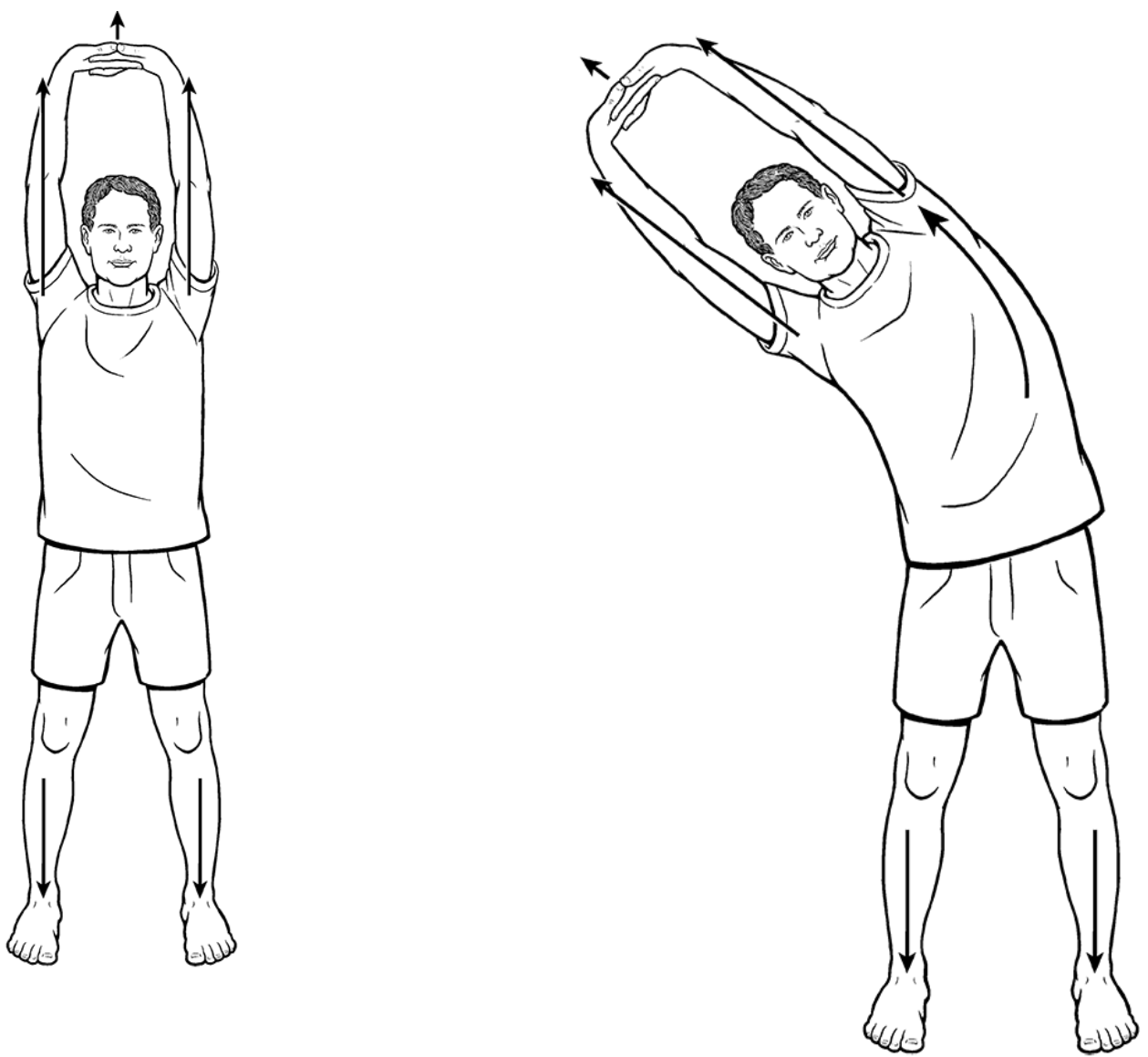


Figure 6.7A and 6.7B (Yin-Yang Side Bend)

5. Lateral Swimming Dragon

Like the Eight Golden Brocades, the Swimming Dragon is another simple, popular qigong practice; it has one main and two secondary movements. Here, we'll use a secondary movement to continue opening the back and spine while adding benefit to the pelvis and hips.

Purpose

Physical: Stretches the muscles between the sides of the upper pelvis and lowest ribs; stretches the neck muscles while rotating the cervical spine; laterally flexes and extends the entire vertebral column in an S curve, stretching the related small internal muscles, tendons, and ligaments. This can help minimize the discomfort of scoliosis. This is one of the few exercises that stretches the hips. Massages most of the internal organs.

Energetic: Benefits the Gall Bladder and Spleen meridians, and frees the Du and Urinary Bladder meridians. Laterally unbinds the Shoulder's Nests and Kwa, gently pumping qi flow through those energetic structures and furthering the connection through the core side channels between the legs and torso, and arms and torso.

Techniques used

Stretching, joint mobilization, focused breathing.

Method

To establish your starting position, stand with your feet very close together. Ideally, they should be touching along their entire length, but if your balance makes that too difficult, spread your feet apart only wide enough so that you feel secure and stable. Keep them parallel. Place your palms together in front of your chest, fingers pointing toward the sky, thumb side toward your chest and little finger side directed outward in front of you, in a “prayer hands” position. Push your palms together with a gentle pressure, and keep your elbows pointing straight out to your sides, doing your best to keep them pointing that way throughout this exercise.

Next, without moving your feet, simultaneously move your hips to the right, while pushing your elbows to the left, and turn your head to the right so that your chin moves close to or over your right shoulder. This creates a lateral S-shaped curve in your spine from the tip of your tailbone to the base of your skull (**Fig 6.8** on next page).

In this movement, some deviation is inevitable, but you nevertheless want to strive to keep your arms parallel to the ground, both elbows pointing to the sides exactly perpendicular to your body, and to keep every part of your torso facing straight forward, including your hips and knees. It’s very common to rotate your body so that your right hip moves rearward and your left hip forward. While doing so is not dangerous, it does minimize the lateral stretch in your spine and hips, thereby minimizing the overall benefits.

Return to your starting position, and repeat in the opposite direction, moving your hips to the left, elbows to the right, and turning your head to the left. Again return to starting position.

Inhale as you turn to the side, and exhale as you return to your starting position. Pace your movement to match a comfortable breathing rate. Repeat at least ten times, but it’s fine to do more if you’d like.

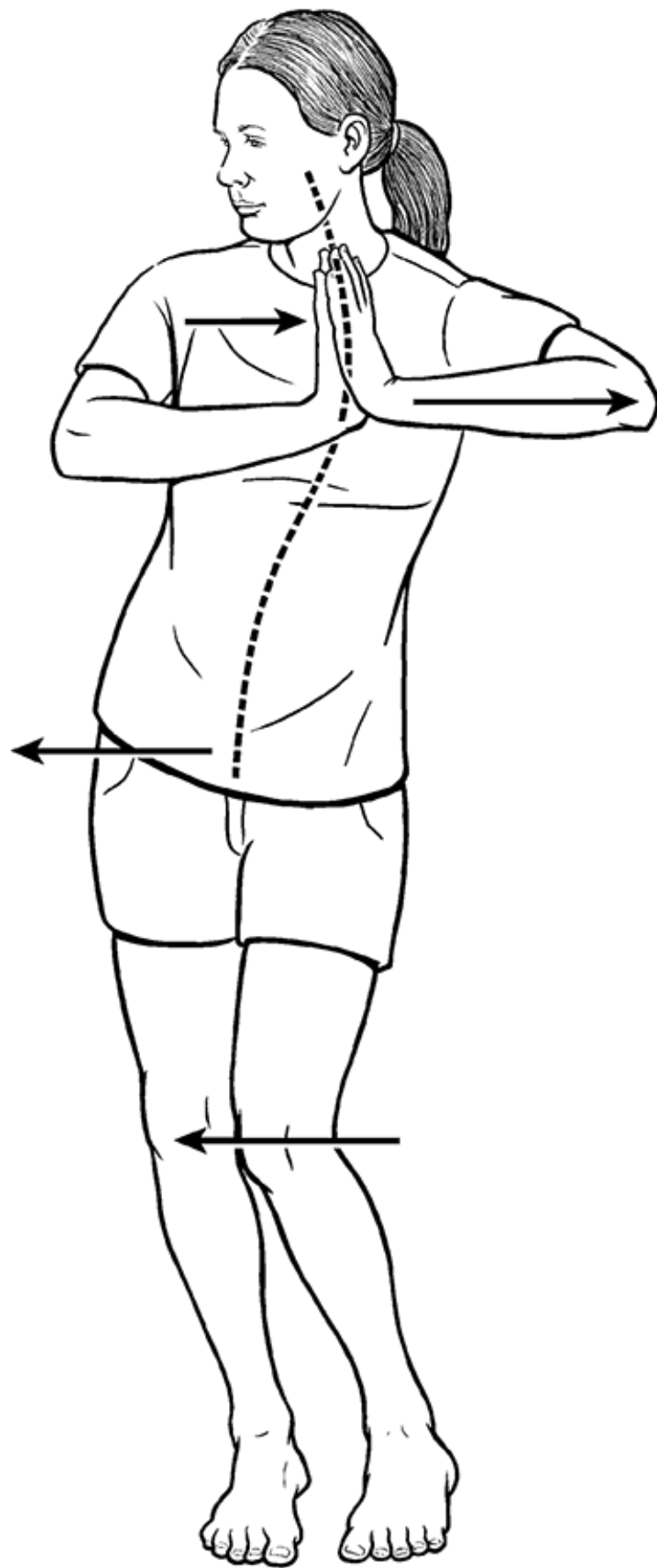


Figure 6.8 (Lateral Swimming Dragon)

6. Standing Toe Touch, Legs Together

This is a common exercise with some variation used in many traditions, including standard Western gymnastics. This version is done more slowly than may be seen in a gym class, using breath to facilitate the release and stretch. It will further open the back

and spine, and has associated energetics involved.

How far you bend forward may be limited by a restriction in your back, but equally common the restriction may be in your hamstrings. It may be helpful to do the hamstring stretches in the Seated Leg exercises section before attempting this one, especially if you have a known back problem, to minimize any possible strain. In this standing version, gravity will be pushing down more on your back than in the seated hamstring stretch.

Purpose

Physical: Stretches and opens the back muscles, and will additionally stretch the hamstring muscles if they are tight. Increases space at the rear of the vertebral column, improving the alignment of the vertebrae. This also reduces compression on the intervertebral discs, reducing disc wear, and allows them to rehydrate (absorb fluid) and “plump up,” so they can better cushion the vertebral bones. That reduces bone wear and may help to prevent arthritic changes in the back. Because of positional changes in the head, coupled with the stretch through the neck, blood flow into and out of the brain may be improved.

Energetic: Opens the Urinary Bladder and Du meridians, removing obstruction to qi flow in those channels. Associated benefits are discussed in the introduction to this chapter.

Techniques used

Stretching, gravity-facilitated release, Daoist yoga, focused breathing.

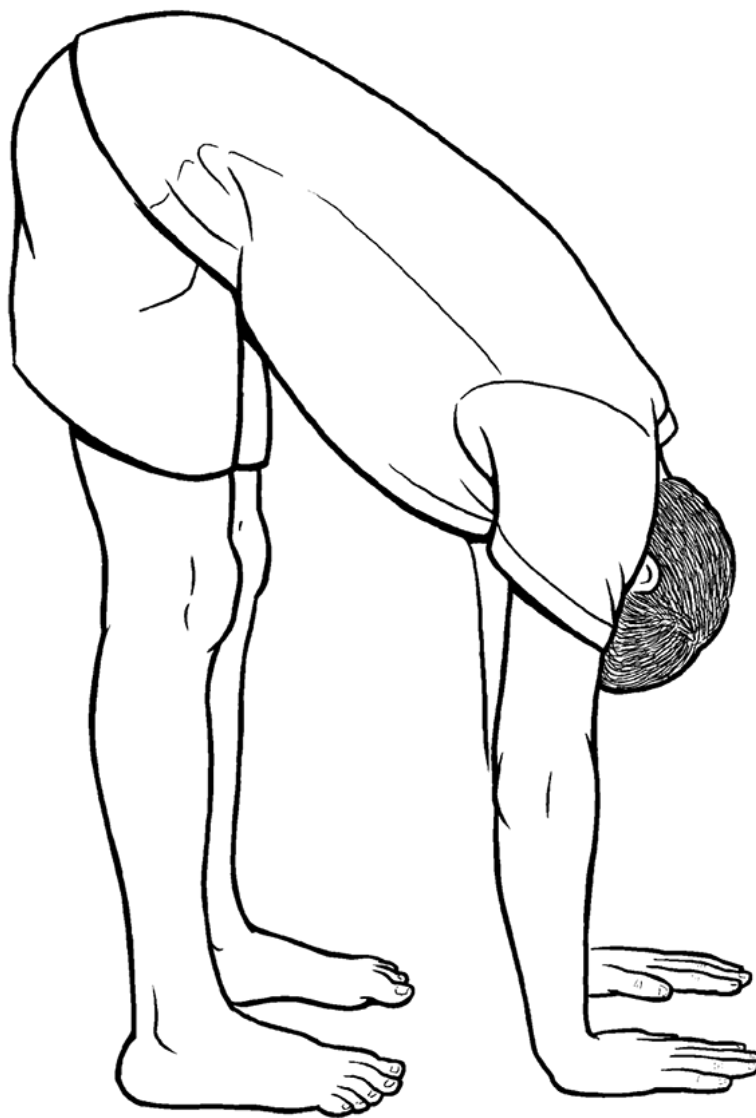


Figure 6.9 (Standing Toe Touch, Legs Together)

Method

Stand with your feet very close together. Ideally they should be touching along their entire length, but if your balance makes that too difficult, spread your feet apart only wide enough so that you feel secure and stable. Keep them parallel. Also keep your knees straight, but not locked, through the entire exercise. Inhale, and then on the exhalation bend forward, moving the tips of your fingers toward the tips of your toes. At some point before you're able to reach your toes, you may be unable to bend farther, coming to the end of your stretch. In that position, simply take a few more slow, deep breaths, direct your breath to the tight areas of your back, and on every exhalation release more of that tension as best as possible. You may find that you're able to get your fingers a little closer to your toes in that way. Do not try to forcibly stretch your arms to make your fingers extend to your toes. That will often put an undue strain on your back. Remember, the purpose here is not to touch your toes—that's just a reference target—but to open your back.

If you can touch your toes, you may comfortably be able to place the palms of your hands flat on the ground (**Fig 6.9**). That's the next and final physical step to work toward

in this exercise. Until that becomes comfortable, breathe as directed above to facilitate more release in your back. Some very flexible people may be able to grasp the back of their ankles and pull their forehead to their knees, common in yoga practices for example, but that's neither necessary nor desirable for this exercise.

At whatever point you come to the end of your stretch, let your neck relax, so that your head hangs loose, pointing toward the ground. Feel the weight of your head create a traction that further stretches your back, continuing through your entire neck. Again use your breath to release any tension you may feel, allowing your entire back to open more fully. Stay in this stretch for just two or three breaths at first, gradually building up to ten breaths over the course of a month or more.

On an inhalation, rise slowly to full upright position. It's possible you may feel dizzy, either while bent forward or more typically when rising. This is due to changes in bloodflow and pressure into and out of your head; it can be minimized by rising slowly. With continued practice over time, the dizziness will pass, one yardstick of improvement, but take it slowly and carefully until then.

7. Opposite Leg Toe Touch, the Whole Body Windmill

This exercise builds on and adds to the previous one, and so should only be attempted after you can at least touch your toes with the tips of your fingers. It is similar to but different from the common Windmill Toe Touch practiced in calisthenics.

Purpose

Physical: Stretches and opens the back muscles, stretches the hamstring muscles, and increases space at the rear of the vertebral column, improving the alignment of the vertebrae. A rotational component is added to the stretch through the back and torso, legs, and neck. Although not specifically an exercise for the shoulders, the arms are used here in a way that moves the shoulders through a large portion of their range of motion, opening them and the armpits. Practiced more vigorously than the previous exercise, bloodflow is increased throughout the body. Because of positional changes in the head, coupled with the rotational stretch through the neck, bloodflow into and out of the brain may be improved.

Energetic: Opens the Urinary Bladder and Du meridians, removing obstruction to qi flow in those channels. Because the rotation of the torso opens the sides of the body, the Gall Bladder meridian is stimulated. The internal organs—especially the liver, gall bladder, stomach, and spleen—are massaged and are benefited physically and energetically.

Techniques used

Stretching, twisting (rotational stretch), focused breathing.

Method

Stand with your feet parallel and 2 1/2 to 3 feet apart in a comfortably wide stance, knees straight but not locked. Raise your arms straight out at your sides so that your hands are at about the height of your shoulders, fingers to the sky and palms facing outward as though you were standing in a narrow hallway and your palms were touching the walls to either side of you. Elbows should be straight but not locked, and ideally the tips of the elbows should be pointed down toward the ground (**Fig 6.10A**). That will help keep your shoulders and neck open.

Inhale fully, and on a slow exhale bend forward, keeping your spine straight as much as possible, while turning your torso to the left. Lower your right arm and extend your right hand to touch your left foot. If you are able to stretch farther, place the palm of your hand on the ground directly in front of your left foot, or to the left of your foot if you want even more stretch. Simultaneously raise your left arm, moving it above your head so that the palm is facing the sky and your fingertips are pointed to the right. Turn your head to the left, and look upward toward your left hand as your right hand touches your left foot (**Fig 6.10B**). Inhale as you rise to your starting position, upright and arms out to your sides, and then repeat, this time turning to the right.

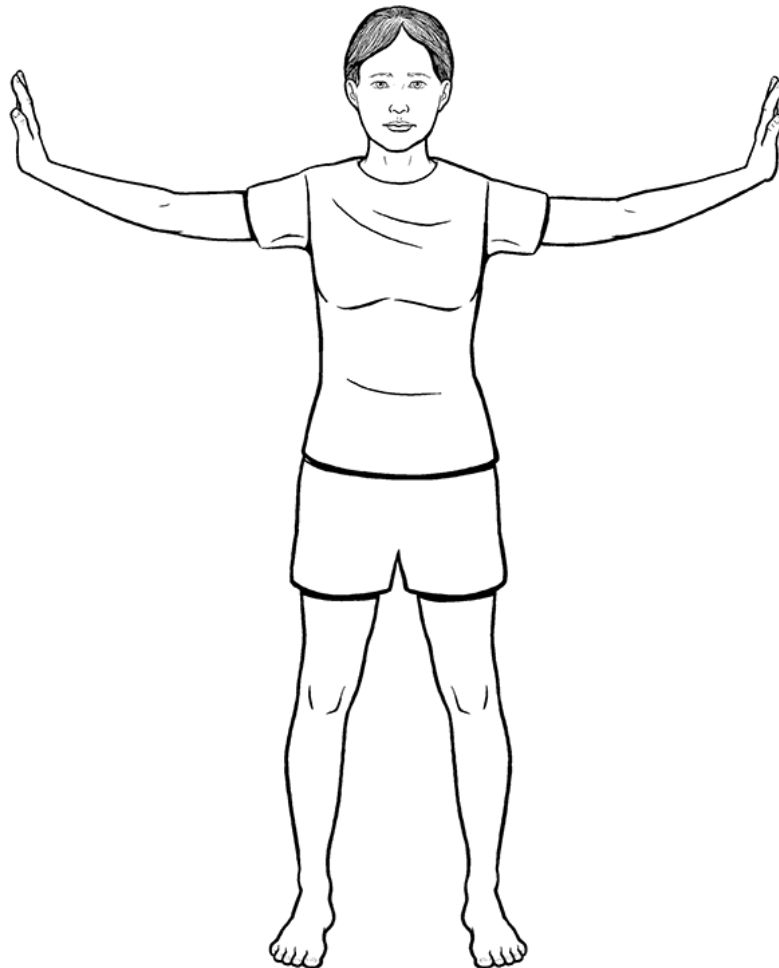


Figure 6.10A (Opposite Leg Toe Touch, the Whole Body Windmill)

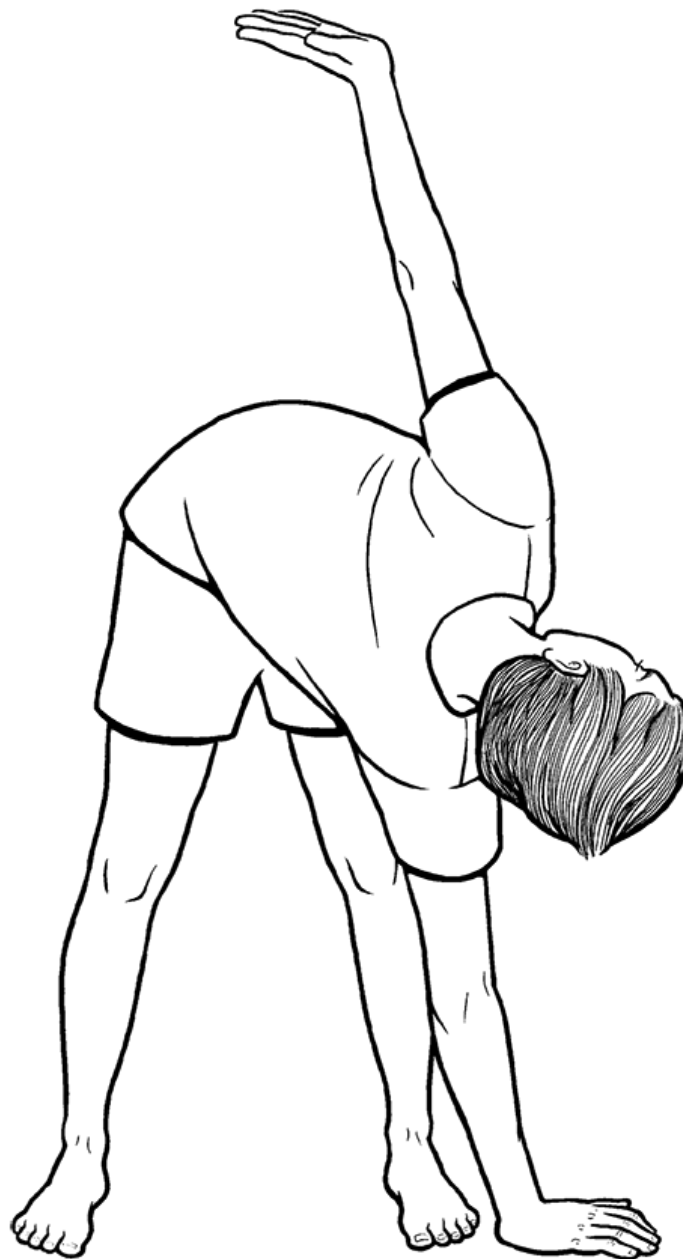


Figure 6.10B (Opposite Leg Toe Touch, the Whole Body Windmill)

If you want to increase the release in a tight body part, you can hold the position with your hand to the ground and head turned to your upper hand, and breathe into any tight area for a number of breaths before returning to an upright position. If you want more aerobic benefit, you can do the exercise more rapidly once you are comfortable with it.

8. Seated Torso Twist

This is a variation of a popular yoga posture, an example of how similar exercises may arise in different cultures, sometimes for the same or similar purposes, and sometimes for very different ones. This is another more challenging stretch, requiring your legs and hips to be already fairly open. Depending on how flexible you are currently, and as a reminder, you may elect to skip this exercise for now, until your body opens more from practicing other exercise. This is of course true for any exercise you may find too difficult. Don't let that discourage you from doing the ones you can, as they will help you on their own and

make it possible for you to do more difficult ones farther down the road.

Purpose

Physical: Creates a strong rotational stretch throughout the whole spine, increasing the benefits begun in other rotational spine stretches, and stretches the hip rotator muscles. Helps stabilize the pelvis and hips, opens the low back, promotes freer movement between the pelvis and low back, and reduces low back pain.

Energetic: Opens the Urinary Bladder and Du meridians, removing obstruction to qi flow in those channels. Both the rotation of the torso and the hip rotator stretch opens the sides of the body, so the lower portion of the Gall Bladder meridian is opened and qi flow is stimulated. Opens and activates the Daimai (Girdling or Belt Vessels, which energetically bind and connect with all the regular acupuncture meridians), benefits the kidneys, and stimulates the Mingmen (Life Gate, or Gate of Vitality, an energy center located between the Kidneys.)

Techniques used

Stretching, rotational stretch/twist, Daoist yoga, focused breathing.

Method

Sit on the floor. Fold your right leg beneath you by bending your right knee, keeping your knee on the ground, and slide your right foot beneath your left upper thigh, so that your right heel is at or just under your left buttock. With your left leg bent at the knee, place your left foot flat on the floor just to the right of your right knee. In this position, your left leg is crossed over your right. Keep your lower left leg from knee to ankle as close to vertical as possible, that is, not leaning to one side or the other. Place your left palm flat on the floor for support, just to the left of, or as far to the rear of your left hip as is comfortable. Alternatively, you may prefer to make a fist instead of using a flat palm, as that will give your left side slightly more lift and aid in keeping your spine perpendicular to the ground. Turn your body a little to the left, and place your right elbow just to the left of your left knee, in solid contact with it. Make a soft fist with your right hand, and move your right forearm perpendicular to the ground, so that your fist is directed toward the sky. For many people, this is already a significant stretch.

If you're able, keeping your right forearm perpendicular, move it to the right, pushing your left knee farther to the right. Simultaneously push your left hand into the ground and forward, so that it moves your torso rearward to the left (**Fig 6.11**). This will twist your whole spine, and your lumbar (low back) spine in particular. It's common to feel and hear a cracking and popping when doing this, much like a chiropractic adjustment. Do your best to keep your spine upright, perpendicular to the ground.

When you reach the limit of your stretch, incorporate your breath in order to gradually increase the stretch. Inhale slowly and fully into the areas you feel are most tight, and on

an equally slow and full exhale, release the tension in those places and see if you can increase the stretch just a little more, turning your body slightly more to the left. Repeat until you are unable to increase the stretch, being careful to avoid causing yourself pain. Hold this stretch for just four or five breaths to start, breathing into any areas of tension or discomfort, and release that tension with each exhalation. Over time, you can increase that to ten or more if you like. Then repeat the above in the opposite direction, facing right.



Figure 6.11 (Seated Torso Twist)

If your hip rotators or low back are very tight, you may not be able to increase the stretch at all in the beginning. In that case, just hold your starting position, and breath as directed above without trying to increase the stretch. Do try to become more relaxed and release whatever tension you may feel, especially focusing on the exhales to best accomplish that. As you are able to increase the relaxation and release, you will find that you can begin to increase the stretch.

Variation

If you're unable to get into the full starting position but can get your legs close, try this variation. Once you're seated properly, grasp your left knee with your right hand, right fingers curling around the knee, and place your left hand on top of your right. Then gently pull your knee to the right with your right hand, while pushing with the left (**Fig 6.12**). This will move your knee to the right and your torso to the left as in the original exercise, but is a bit easier, you may increase the stretch in smaller increments, and you will be less able to overturn and overstretch, a built-in safeguard against doing too much. Use your breath to relax into this stretch as directed above. Repeat in the opposite direction.



Figure 6.12 (Seated Torso Twist)

9. Lying Du Meridian Back Extension

As in the previous exercise, this has a counterpart in Hatha yoga: the Cobra pose. There are other ways to do back extensions, standing variations, but lying down offers more protection for an injured or weak back, and less chance of injury than in standing variations. It also mimics the way we first activated our Du meridian as babies.

The Du meridian is one of the Eight Extra (Extraordinary) meridians. While all meridians form during embryonic development, the Eight Extra meridians are believed to only fully activate sometime after birth. The physical activity a baby engages in to both promote and reflect the activation of the Du meridian involves gradually pushing him- or herself toward an upright position. First, the upper part of the back activates, near the base of the neck, at the acupoint Du 14, and the baby raises his or her head. Soon after, the lower back is activated, near the point Du 4, and the baby arches his or her back, pushing itself up, elongating the paravertebral muscles and spine. You'll see that this exercises mirrors that process exactly. In a baby, this instinctive behavior is the physical manifestation of perceptual and psychological states, the lifting of the head allowing the baby to look toward the horizon, establishing an initial goal. Once the goal is seen, the

baby develops the posture to move toward that goal. In very goal-oriented adults, this can be a causative factor in stiff necks and low back pain from doing too much. None of the other back exercises taught here involve extension, so they all will counterbalance that tendency. Done gently, back extensions can unlock those stiff areas in different ways and provide other benefits as well.

Purpose

Physical: Opens the front of the spine, elongates the paraspinal muscles (the muscles that are at either side of the vertebral column), massages the kidneys and adrenals, may improve general and sexual vitality.

Energetic: Stimulates qi flow through both the Du and Ren meridians, and secondarily the Urinary Bladder, Kidney, Stomach, Spleen, and Liver meridians. The Du meridian governs the body's Yang qi, and the Ren governs the Yin qi. They overlay the Microcosmic Orbit, which has a harmonizing effect on the whole body; the energetic benefits are far-reaching.



Figure 6.13 (Lying Du Meridian Back Extension)

Techniques used

Stretching, back extension, focused breathing.

Method

Lie face down on the ground, with your palms down directly under or slightly in front of your shoulders, as though you were about to do pushups. Your toes can be pointing straight back or curled so that the toe pads are touching the ground. Lift your head so that you are looking straight forward. Then on an exhalation, push up with your hands and arms, and only gently engage your low back muscles to arch your back. Make sure you support your weight with your hands and arms throughout, as this will prevent the possibility of back strain. Keep your pelvis in contact with the ground, which will increase the rearward bend in your low back. Feel a lengthening of your entire spine, from your tailbone to the top of your head. If you feel a compression in your back, press your hands a little more strongly into the ground to try to lengthen your spine and reduce the

compression (**Fig 6.13**). If you are not able to do that, you may need to lower your chest slightly closer to the ground, only to the point where the compression disappears. If you are able, arch your back far enough to be able to look straight up to the sky. You may feel a stretch along the front of your belly. That is both normal and beneficial. At whatever point you reach your limit of extension, take a few slow, deep breaths. Breathe into any area of restriction, and on the exhalation, try to relax and release it. You may be able to increase your extension after a few exhalations. Hold this posture for five to ten breaths, and then lower yourself back to your starting position on an exhalation. Repeat three times.

[contents]

Seven

Neck

The next series of exercises focuses on the neck. The health of the neck is extremely important. Throughout the whole waking day, your neck supports the weight of your head and holds it upright. This is a little more challenging for people who sit at a desk for most of their work or school day, with their head inclined forward looking at a computer screen or doing paperwork, since the neck vertebrae are put out of optimal alignment and the neck muscles are forced to work harder for long parts of the day, every day.

The neck is the connecting pathway between your head and the rest of your body. This means it's involved with the exchange of blood into and out of your head, including your brain, sense organs, and all your facial and scalp muscles. Any physical obstruction or restriction can reduce blood flow, impairing cognition, perception, and expression. Poor venous return, blood leaving the head to return to the heart, can increase the pressure inside the head and cause headaches, increase the concentration of metabolic and acquired waste products in the head, and set the stage for strokes. All the spinal nerves pass through the neck, from the brain to govern various functions of the body, and to the brain to relay information about the condition of the body and numerous environmental factors. Reduced nerve impulse transmission through the neck can impair the function of organs and muscles, and diminish sensory input so that various physical warning signs or dangers may go unnoticed. Virtually all acupuncture meridians pass through the neck, including seven of the Eight Extraordinary meridians and the core constitutional channels. While only the Yang, Du, and Ren meridians have external pathways through the neck and into the head, capable of being needled in acupuncture treatments, the Yin meridians have direct and indirect internal pathways there. The other neck and head Extraordinary meridians can only be needled through their associations with the regular meridians. As all of those meridians benefit from these exercises; the energetics are too extensive to list here individually.

Neck pain, which is almost always accompanied by upper back and shoulder pain, is epidemic in our culture, as are headaches. They may be the obvious result of traumatic injury, but otherwise physiologically, they may indicate muscle spasm, nerve impingement, or both, and cause or result from inflammation or other irritating factors,

including mental and emotional stress. Arteries are muscular and are implicated in some types of headaches when they spasm within the head. Any type of spasm reduces blood flow, diminishing nourishment to the affected and surrounding muscles and allowing toxic waste to accumulate. This is one aspect of what the Chinese refer to as Blood Stagnation. In the absence of trauma, Blood Stagnation is usually a complication of prolonged Qi Stagnation, so attending to the associated energetics even before trouble is noticed is always a wise precaution. As with back pain, the narrowing of space between vertebrae and the degeneration of the vertebral bones may be involved. Most people naturally avoid anything that triggers pain, and often in the case of neck pain, especially chronic neck pain, that means reducing mobility. Reduced mobility eventually reduces functionality, which leads to further reduced mobility. So, while neck and shoulder pain may seem to mainly be common, troublesome nuisances, they are frequently the early stages of more serious complications if left untreated.

Most of these exercises utilize bending and stretching, flexion and extension, rotation, or combinations of those. Unless otherwise noted, they don't involve held stretches, so focused breathing is optional. The main concern with breath throughout this series is that the breath should never be held. As a reminder, that's true for all the exercises in this book. The entire series should not take much time, and ideally every exercise should be performed. The purpose of each is to maintain or improve the functionality of the neck and prevent or reduce pain, and to facilitate the transmission of nerve impulses and flows of blood and qi into and out of the head, for the reasons outlined above. It is common and normal to feel and hear popping and/or crunching sounds as you perform these exercises. The medical name for that is crepitus. Since you will not be actively trying to "crack" your neck in any of these exercises, the sounds you may hear are not at all damaging or dangerous, and in fact most often reduce over time with practice, indicating a healing response.

All of these exercises are best performed seated, either in a chair or on the ground, whichever is most comfortable. In terms of the seated posture, the most important thing is to keep your back straight. Slouching is counterproductive, since it creates a misalignment of the vertebrae of your back, which is the foundation upon which your neck rests. If you sit in a chair it should be firm, not plush, and you should sit on the forward half to the forward third of the seat. This will help keep your back straight. Do not lean on any seat back unless you have a serious back problem that requires that support. Place your hands on your knees, and let the weight of your arms comfortably pull your shoulders downward, helping to release any tension there. If you sit on the ground, either directly or on a cushion, make sure part of your focus is maintained on keeping your back straight. You may place your hands on your knees or keep them folded in your lap. Keeping your back straight also means that your shoulders and torso want to remain

stationary, facing straight forward. In these exercises, we want to specifically target the neck, and for that to happen most effectively, only the neck should move.

Breathe comfortably, slowly, fully, and deeply, with no held breath at the end of either the inhale or exhale, and no place in between. From this starting posture, begin the neck exercises.

1. Flex and Extend

This simple exercise is always a good place to begin the neck exercises. It helps to loosen the neck vertebrae, soften the muscles, and increase regional blood flow, and prepares the neck for what comes later.



Figures 7.1A and 7.1B (Flex and Extend)

Keep your head facing straight forward, not turning to one side or the other, and carefully drop your chin toward your chest, as though you were nodding “yes.” Let the weight of your head stretch your neck forward as far as it will go, but do not force it farther forward than that (**Fig 7.1A**). As your neck opens over time, the natural final end point will be when your chin actually touches your chest. Then raise your head to its starting position, and slowly tilt it backward some to look toward the sky (**Fig 7.1B**). This backward extension should be limited, not as full as you might be able to move your neck. That’s because there are parts of the vertebrae—the spinous processes—that extend to the back of your neck, and they can get jammed together if you tilt your head

back too forcefully or too far. In neigong practices, you may learn to increase the space between the vertebrae, which will safely allow a greater extension, but outside of that circumstance the neck is not structurally designed to extend far. A relatively slight extension is fine for this exercise.

Repeat this forward bend and backward extension ten to twelve times, slowly and purposefully, with no jarring at the ends of the bend in either direction. Breathe comfortably and naturally throughout. Return your head to its starting position and begin the next exercise.

2. Turtle

The Turtle naturally picks up where Flex and Extend ends. This exercise creates a glide, the motion of each vertebra sliding forward and back over its neighbors.

With your head fully upright and facing forward, stick your chin out as far as your neck allows, keeping your jaw as close to parallel to the ground as possible (**Fig 7.2A**). Feel the glide between the neck vertebrae, possibly extending into your upper back. This looks a bit like a turtle sticking its head out of its shell. Then, still facing forward and keeping your jaw parallel to the ground, withdraw your chin as far back as you can, tucking it in toward your neck (**Fig 7.2B**). You may feel or encourage a slight corresponding rise of the top of your head toward the sky. The chin tuck and rise of the head opens the back of the neck. Repeat this ten to twelve times, then return your head to its starting position and begin the next exercise.



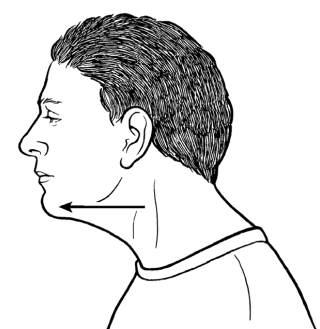
Figures 7.2A and 7.2B (Turtle)

3. Crane

The Crane completes the set of three forward neck bends. Ideally, you should practice all three whenever you do these neck exercises.

Begin as though you were doing the Turtle, sticking your chin out as far as your neck

allows, keeping your jaw as close to parallel to the ground as possible (**Fig 7.3A**). Then, with your neck fully protracted (chin jutting forward), bend your neck forward as if you were wrapping the front of your neck around a ball under your chin (**Fig 7.3B**). Keep your chin as close to your body as you can, making sure you don't drop the imaginary ball you are holding as you pull it up the front of your neck with your chin (**Fig 7.3C**). Feel the back of your neck extending and your whole neck unfurl as you gradually return your head to a fully upright position. At the end of the unfurl, give a little extra lift to your head, extending it straight up toward the sky. Repeat ten to twelve times.



Figures 7.3A and 7.3B (Crane)



Figure 7.3C (Crane)



Figure 7.4 (Side to Side)

4. Side to Side

This is the first neck exercise to include a side-to-side motion. If we liken the Flex and Extend exercise to nodding yes, this exercise is like shaking your head no.

Begin with your head fully upright and facing forward. Keep your jaw parallel to the ground, and turn your head slowly to the left, moving your chin toward your left shoulder. Keep your neck straight up, fully lengthened and perpendicular to the ground (**Fig 7.4**). At the end point of the turn, it's common for people to want to tilt their head a little, moving it rearward to get a sense of an increased stretch. It's also common to allow your left shoulder to move rearward, as that will allow you to turn farther and give you the illusion that you're turning your neck more. You want to avoid both those possibilities, to do the stretch honestly and accurately, in order to get the best result from this exercise.

Then turn straight forward to your starting position, and continue the turn in the opposite direction, moving your chin toward your right shoulder this time. Repeat the left and right turn ten to twelve times.



Figure 7.5 (Lateral Flexion)

5. Lateral Flexion

In this second side-to-side neck exercise, your head stays facing straight forward throughout.

Begin with your head fully upright and facing forward. Tilt your head to the left so that your left ear moves toward your left shoulder (**Fig 7.5**). It's common to turn your head to the left when doing this, so do your best to avoid that, keeping your head facing straight forward. A little trickier, try to lengthen your neck at the same time. To help with that, imagine that someone has their hand placed lightly at the top of your head, tracking your movement while you try to push the top of your head into their hand as you move your head to the left. In addition to stretching the right side of your neck better, opening the vertebrae at the right side of your neck, this neck lengthening also opens the left side of your neck some, keeping space there to minimize any excess compression or bone-on-bone contact on that side of your neck.

Then return your head to its starting position and repeat, tilting your head to the right so that your right ear moves toward your right shoulder this time. Do your best to keep your neck lengthened as you slowly move your head side to side ten to twelve times.

Once you sense your neck is lengthened, you can add a held stretch after the last sideways tilt in each direction. To do that, with your head tilted left, reach over the top of

your head with your left hand, and place your palm on your head so that your left fingertips are close to your right ear. Let the weight of your left arm alone slightly increase the stretch, taking care not to actively pull your head to the left. Keep your neck lengthened so that the left sides of your cervical vertebrae do not grind on each other. In this held stretch, you can add focused breathing, inhaling into any tight or uncomfortable area, and releasing tension with each exhalation. Breathe five to ten times, then repeat the held stretch in the same way on the other side of your neck, head tilted to the right.

6. Chin to Chest Neck Rotation

This is a variation of the more well-known full neck rotation, one that provides as much benefit without the danger of grinding the bones of the cervical vertebrae.

Drop your chin to your chest, as in the beginning of the Flex and Extend exercise earlier (**Fig 7.6A** on next page). Keeping your chin as close to your body as possible, your neck fully flexed, imagine that you are drawing a line on your chest with the tip of your chin toward your left shoulder as you rotate your neck to the left. Your chin will rise as it approaches your shoulder. When turned as far to the left as your neck allows, look slightly downward over the back of your left shoulder if possible, to maximize the stretch (**Fig 7.6B** on next page). Then draw the imaginary line with the tip of your chin back to your starting position at the center of your chest, and continue turning your head to the right until you reach the end of your stretch and look slightly downward over the back of your right shoulder. Keep your movement smooth, slow, and deliberate. There is no particular breathing pattern used here, but remember to keep your breath smooth, full, and even, with no held breath at any point. Repeat this side-to-side rotation ten to twelve times.



Figures 7.6A and 7.6B (Chin to Chest Neck Rotation)

You may feel or hear crunching or popping noises, but that is normal, an indication of

crepitus as described earlier, not bone grinding on bone.

7. Thumb Massage to Back of Neck

In this exercise, you will massage two or three parallel lines up the back of your neck. This self-massage is taken from Chinese Anmo and Tuina massage practices, which contain the physical therapy of standard massage and the energetic components of acupuncture. Close to your spine, you will be accessing and benefiting the qi of the Urinary Bladder; slightly farther out, the Gall Bladder. The Sanjiao meridian intersects those diagonally. You may also access the qi of the small intestine, farther to the sides of your neck. That might be missed in this practice, but it is addressed in others in this section.



Figure 7.7 (Thumb Massage to Back of Neck)

Interlock your fingers and place your hands at the back of your head, cradling the base of your skull. Point your thumbs downward toward the top of your shoulders (**Fig 7.7**). You may need to slide your hands a little lower, letting your thumbs touch your neck where it joins your back. Your interlocked fingers will allow you to use more force with your thumbs than you might otherwise be able. Using pressure comfortable to both your thumbs and neck, press into your neck with your thumb tips at the base of your neck. You may want to incline your head some to open the back of your neck for easier access. Make circling movements with your thumbs, massaging into your neck muscles. Start slightly wider on your neck, near the sides of your neck, and gradually move your circling thumbs upward in a relatively straight line until you reach the base of your skull. Then massage back down along the same line. Move your thumbs inward slightly, closer to your vertebrae, and repeat the circling massage up and down your neck. If there is room for you to move your thumbs closer still (without placing them directly on the center of the vertebrae), repeat the circling massage for a third and final time, up to the base of the skull and back down.

Wherever you may feel tension or tenderness, at any point on any of the three lines along the back of your neck, stay on those spots a bit longer. Massage long enough to feel some of the tension dissipate and the muscles soften. This may feel a little sore, but in a “good hurt” way. With practice over time that soreness will lessen and vanish.

8. Resistance Exercises

All the previous neck exercises are loosening, opening, stretching, and mobilizing practices. These final exercises are not Chinese, to the best of my knowledge, but are isometric strengthening exercises for the neck. Muscle strengthening exercises are useful for the entire body, of course, but the neck is a special case in that it works nonstop throughout the day to hold up the weight of your head, and weak neck muscles are a contributing factor to many causes of neck pain. A strong neck is more stable (better able to hold the improvements from the previous exercises), less prone to injury, and will help to minimize or reverse degenerative changes.

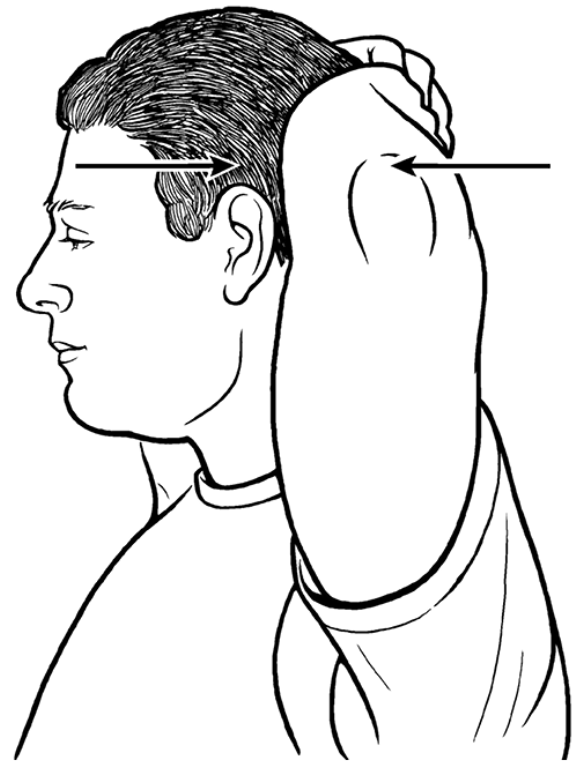
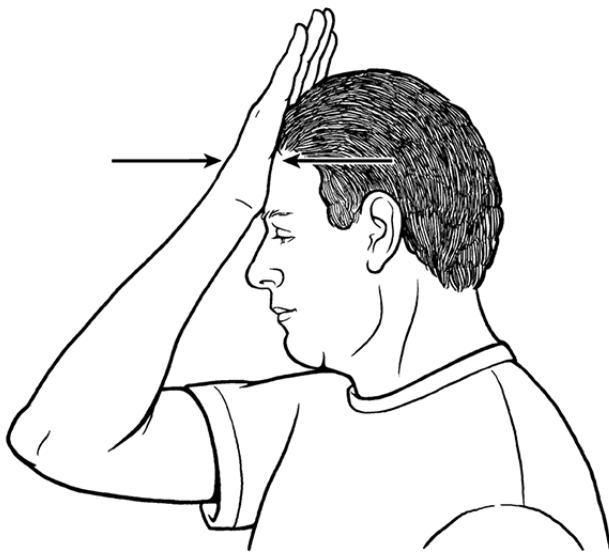
1. Forward Resistance. With your head fully upright and facing forward, place the palm of your strongest hand on your forehead. Push your forehead into your hand as hard as you can without strain (**Fig 7.8A**). Feel the muscles at the front of your neck work as you use your hand to resist and hold it in place. Push for about ten seconds, and then relax. Repeat three times.

2. Rearward Resistance. Interlock your fingers and place your hands at the back of your head, palms cradling the lower part of your skull. Push the back of your skull into your hands as hard as you can without strain (**Fig 7.8B**). Feel the muscles at the back of your neck work as you use your hands to resist and hold it in place. Push for about ten seconds, and then relax. Repeat three times.

3. Lateral/Sideways Resistance. With your head fully upright and facing forward, place your right palm on the right side of your head near your temple. Push the side of your head into your hand as hard as you can without strain (**Fig 7.8C**). Feel the muscles at the right side of your neck work as you use your hand to resist and hold it in place. Push for about ten seconds, and then relax. Repeat three times. Then do the same exercise on your left side.

4. Rotational Resistance. With your head fully upright and facing forward, place your right palm on the right side of your face, with your upper palm near your cheekbone and your lower palm near your jaw. Turn your head into your hand as hard as you can without strain, as though you were trying to look at something at your right side (**Fig 7.8D** on next page). Feel the muscles at the left side of your neck work as you use your hand to resist and hold it in place. This may seem counterintuitive, but the muscles on the left side of your neck are most responsible for it turning to the right. Turn for about ten seconds, and then relax. Repeat three times. Then do the same exercise on your left side.

When you are finished with these resistance exercises, you may want to do a few repetitions of the stretching exercises again to give your neck the sense of loose openness once more. If so, freely select whichever ones appeal to you.



Figures 7.8A and 7.8B (Resistance Exercises)



Figure 7.8C (Resistance Exercises)



Figure 7.8D (Resistance Exercises)

[contents]

Eight

Face, Head, and Sense Organs

The exercises in this chapter focus on the sense organs. Many of these exercises come from what are called either the Seated Eight Brocades or the Seated Twelve Brocades, depending on how many “brocades” are taught in the traditional set. Numbers had a special significance to the ancient Chinese masters, and many contemporary practitioners still adhere to those principles. For our purposes, there’s no need to go into those philosophical distinctions except to point out that they exist, as you may encounter them if you explore these practices further along your path.

There is a well-known, very old yet still popular qigong set called the Eight Brocades, or the Eight Golden Brocades, Baduanjin. Some say that the Seated Brocades are derived from that primary set, but while they are sometimes taught together, they are in fact different if complementary practices. The Eight Brocades are a true qigong but the Seated Brocades, while having some direct effect on qi, are not complete qigongs. That doesn’t diminish their value in building health. It does makes them easier to learn, and more quickly provides the benefits for which they were designed. They have the additional virtue of being able to be practiced by people who are unable to stand due to injury, illness, or advanced age.

The more obvious benefits include better functioning of the sense organs involved—an improvement in vision, hearing, sense of smell, and taste. Along with those benefits, there can be a corresponding improvement in digestion and a decrease in acute or chronic nasal congestion, allowing for easier breathing, for example. The less obvious benefits are derived from the connection each sense organ has to a particular internal organ, through their Five Element correspondences, and from the acupuncture points and meridians that are stimulated. With those connections, and because the sense organs are organs of perception, these exercises can stimulate and improve mental functioning.

Here are the sense organs paired with their corresponding internal organs. The first organ given is the Yin organ, followed by that yin organ’s yang organ partner in parenthesis. In this case, the Yin organ is the one of primary influence, but the yang organ will also be involved. Note that this is a two-way street. That is, the functional condition of the internal organ can manifest in the sense organ, and the sense organ will

also influence the health and functionality of the internal organ.

Eyes: Liver (Gall Bladder)

Ears: Kidneys (Urinary Bladder)

Nose: Lungs (Large Intestine)

Lips and Mouth: Spleen (Stomach)

Tongue: Heart (Small Intestine)

Some of these connections might not be readily apparent to someone not trained in Chinese medical concepts. The easiest might be the nose and lung connection, both because the physical, anatomical pathway is clear, and because a cold or flu can begin with nasal congestion and sneezing which if left untreated can progress to lung congestion and cough. As one more easily understood if less immediately obvious example, consider the connection between the liver and the eyes. Alcohol consumption is well known to be challenging to the liver, and when one drinks too much, two of the most common colloquial descriptions include "seeing double" or being "blind drunk."

In almost all practices designed to influence qi, it's most common to begin from the top of the body and work down when that is practical. Since that's very easy to accommodate in these exercises, we'll follow that principle here.

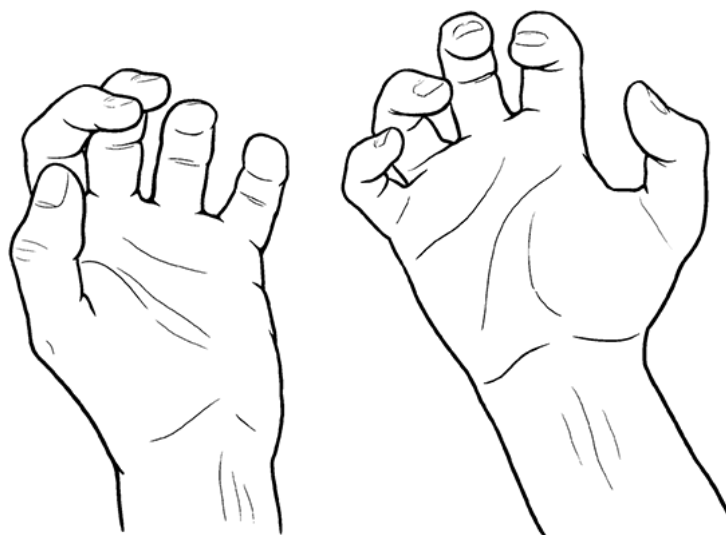


Figure 8.1 (Scalp Rake)

1. Scalp Rake

This opens up the main Yang channels on the scalp and head, the Urinary Bladder, Gall Bladder, and Sanjiao (Triple Burner) meridians. All three communicate directly with the ears and eyes. While not directly stimulating the Du (Governing) meridian, which runs along the centerline of the head, it will receive some benefit from incidental stimulation, its proximity to the other meridians, and its connections to those meridians via small collateral vessels. This will activate the brain, enliven all the senses, and prepare you for all the exercises that follow in this section.

Curl the fingers of both hands as though you are making tiger's claws (**Fig 8.1**). Keep

your fingers firm and close together, and place the tips of them along the front of your hairline (or at the top of your forehead if you are balding). Your little fingers should be touching (**Fig 8.2** on next page). Keeping your little fingers in contact, rake over the top of your head to the base of the back of your skull. Use firm pressure, and make this movement brisk. Repeat two more times. Then spread your hands a bit so that your little fingers are about two inches apart, so that your lines of stimulation are farther apart, and repeat the raking movement again three times. Finally, move your hands farther apart again, so that your thumbs are in front of your ears. Rake back again three times, with your thumbs arcing just above your ears, and ending with your thumb tips coming to rest at the hollow near the outer edge of the back of your skull.

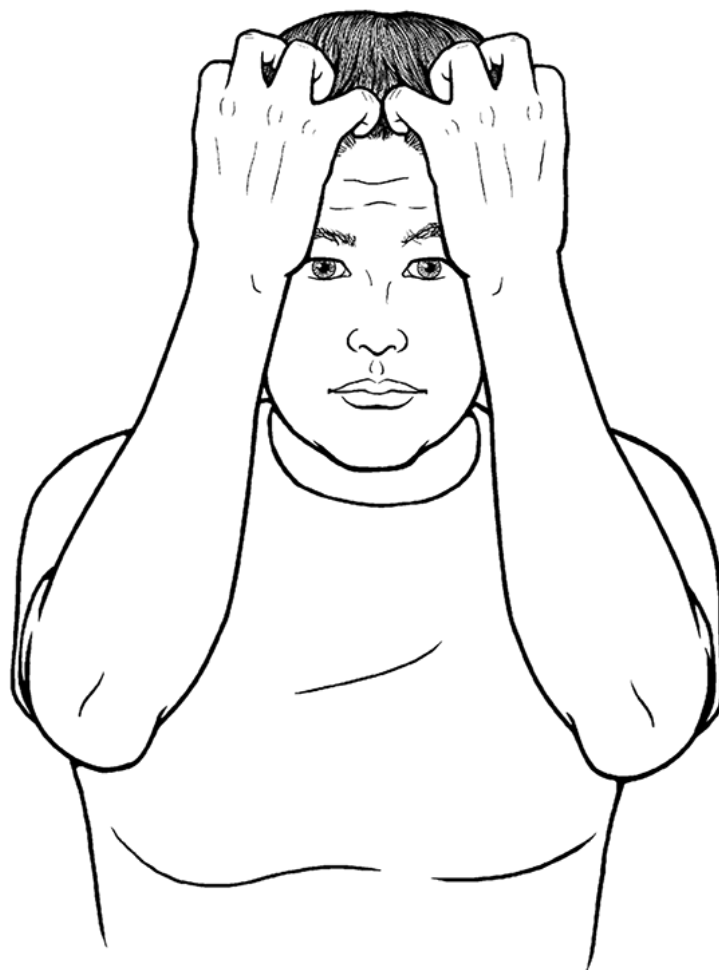


Figure 8.2 (Scalp Rake)

2. Temple Massage

Massage can serve many purposes. This one addresses two common ones: relaxing tight or tense muscles and encouraging qi flow. Together, you can improve local blood circulation as a bonus. Many people don't consider that the scalp is covered in muscle. The muscles at the temples are aptly named the temporalis muscles. The main acupuncture meridian at that location is the Gall Bladder meridian. In addition to the benefits common to all these exercises, this one is useful in relieving both tension and migraine headaches.

Place the tips of two or three fingers, whichever is most comfortable, at both temples, slightly above and in front of your ears. If you press directly toward your skull, you may feel indentations in the bones there. While those are the most advantageous spots for your fingertips, don't worry if you can't find them; anything in that area will be of benefit.

Start gently at first, but gradually apply more pressure as you make small circles with your fingertips. Use "attractive force"—that is, don't let your fingers slide over the surface of your skin, but engage the muscles below. Circle your fingertips ten to twelve times forward, and then the same number of times backward. If you're prone to headaches or stress, you may feel the muscles ache under the pressure. That's not dangerous, and is in fact beneficial and necessary to relieve the tension there. Don't use so much pressure that it actually hurts, though. That's never a good idea. You can repeat the cycle of ten to twelve circles in each direction two or three times if you'd like.

Eye Exercises

3. Ten Point Eye Acupressure Massage

People tend to carry a lot of tension in their eyes, from overusing them in our visually oriented work and cultural environment, and possibly from viewing disturbing or overstimulating imagery either out in the world or generated internally. This can easily become generalized to create or increase stress in every aspect of one's life, since the way you look at things, your perception and outlook on the world becomes quite literally viewed through the lens of that tension. All the eye exercises help to reduce eye tension, and when practiced over time, they will reduce your overall level of stress.

The Ten Point Eye Acupressure Massage most obviously benefits the eyes and can help improve all manner of vision problems. As the eyes are the sense organ associated with the Liver, it will also help improve aspects of Liver functions, notably in its emotional correspondences. People who work with their eyes a lot can be more prone to irritability and anger, as well as depression. Those emotions, especially when habitual and when inappropriate to immediate life circumstances, are generated by the Liver when it is not functioning optimally.

This exercise is also part of a regimen of facial rejuvenation, helping to diminish the fine lines and wrinkles that appear around the eyes with age, and reduce the dark circles and "bags" under the eyes that may result from a lack of adequate sleep, among other things. Liver blood, which is best replenished by regular sleep, nourishes the eyes. Eyes that are habitually tired or weak suffer from inadequate liver blood nourishment. Combine this with the other eye exercises in this section for better results, and for the best results, include any of the exercises for the Liver found elsewhere in this book.

To begin with, you must locate the four points around each of the eyes, and then one at the outer corner of the eyes. The four points are indentations found in the bone

surrounding the eyes, so you'll have to roll your fingers just inside the eyesockets to feel them. You may feel some tenderness or even slight pain when touching those points, another indicator that you're on the right spot and that there's qi stuck there. As previously noted, most Chinese exercises with an energetic component work from the top of the body first and then moves downward, so even within this individual exercise, we'll start by locating the upper eye points.

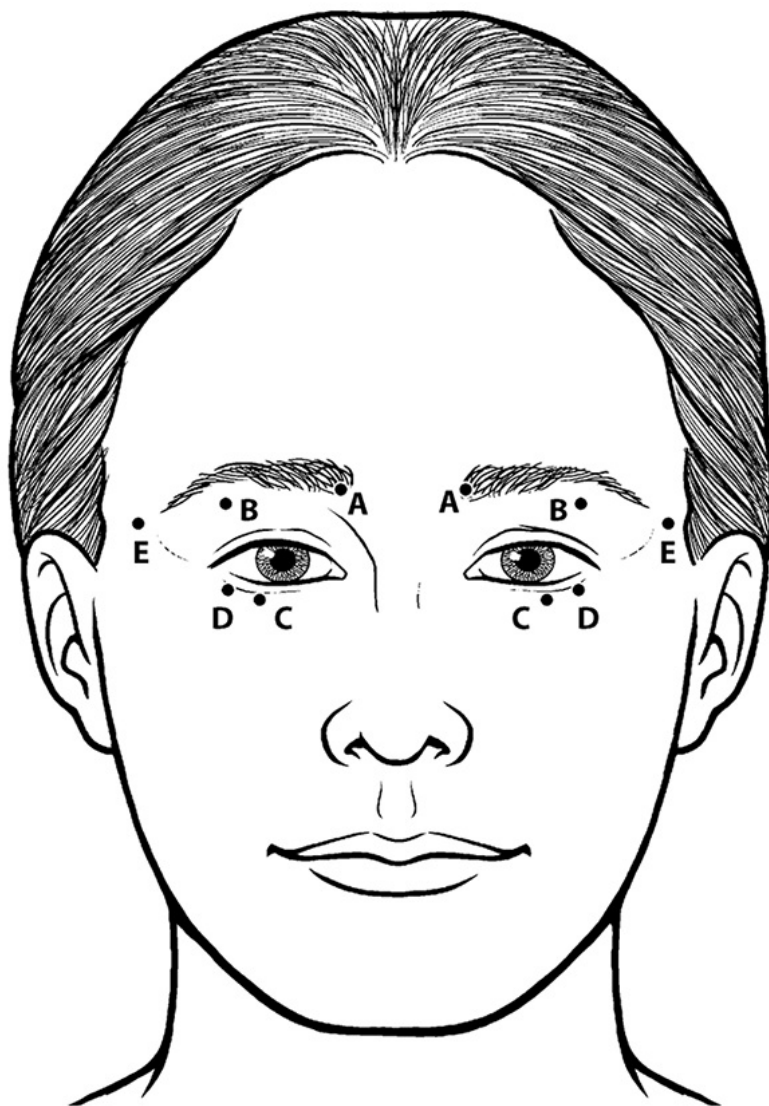


Figure 8.3A–8.3E (Ten Point Eye Acupressure Massage)

Place your thumbs at the inner corner of your eyes, touching the bridge of your nose, with thumb pads facing upward. Gently push up, feeling for the ridge of bone at the upper inner border of your eye socket. Move your thumbs slightly outward until you feel a clear indentation or depression in the bone. If you are looking in a mirror when you do this, you'll see your thumbs have not yet reached the centerline of your eye above your pupils, they're still closer to your nose. That's the first point (**Fig 8.3A**). To find the second point, slide your thumbs toward the outer corner of your eye, thumb pads still pressing gently upward so you can clearly feel the ridge of your eye socket. As you approach the outer corner of your eyes, you'll feel another indentation, perhaps a half inch before your reach

the corner. That's the second point (**Fig 8.3B**).

The third and fourth points are on the inner edge of the lower border of the eye socket, so now you'll use either your index or middle finger to find them. Below your pupil, curl your fingertip just inside the eye socket. Toward your nose, you may feel a slight pointy bump of bone. Feeling outward from that bump, or just slightly outward from the center of your eye, you'll find another indentation. This one may be smaller than some of the others, but still easy to find when you know where to look. That's the third point (**Fig 8.3C**). Sliding your fingers outwards toward the outer corner of your eyes, you'll find the final depression within the eye socket, a finger's width or slightly less from the corner of your eyes (**Fig 8.3D**).

The fifth, final point is outside your eye socket, just beyond the outer corner of each eye. Place the tips of each index finger at the outer corner of your eyes, and slide them outwards toward the side of your head. Feel them pass over a small bony ridge, and then drop into a depression just beyond that ridge, and just very slightly higher than the corner of the eyes. That's the fifth point (**Fig 8.3E**). This is an "extra" acupuncture point, not found on any of the regular or extraordinary meridians, called Taiyang. This is commonly needed to help both with headaches and with eye problems, especially those caused by Wind (the environmental factor associated with the Liver) and Heat. Internal Liver Wind and Liver Heat (Fire) are frequently generated by Liver pathologies, and often cause eye problems that are helped by treating Taiyang.

Now that you've found each point, you can treat them in this way. Follow the order given above, as that will direct any pathology outward, and create a slight lift to assist in cosmetic purposes at the same time. If you felt tenderness or pain with slight pressure while locating them, start with just direct pressure, enough to feel that tenderness. Hold it for about ten seconds, and then remove the pressure. This will help release any muscle tension held there and begin to disperse stagnant or stuck qi. Treat each point in this way. You can repeat this three times on each point. After a week or two, the tenderness should diminish. At that time, or if the points were not tender to begin with, apply some pressure to each point and make very small circles with your fingertips. The circling motion will disperse stagnant qi more effectively, and create more energetic motion so that more healthy qi will be drawn to those points as needed. This is useful and beneficial even if your eyes are completely healthy.

4. Four Directions Eye Exercise

This is an easy set to describe and to perform, and can be done anywhere and anytime. The four directions are:

1. Up and down.
2. Side to side.
3. Diagonally up in one direction to diagonally down in the other direction, both sides.

4. Circles, both clockwise and counterclockwise.

Here's one convenient way to begin this practice. Sit in a chair, facing a wall or an object directly in front of your line of sight as you look straight forward. If you're facing a wall, find a spot, place, or small picture directly in front of you. The object or spot will serve as a point of reference and help keep your eye motion as uniform as possible. Without moving your head, look upward as far as your eyes allow, and find something you can clearly focus on and spot each time you look up. Then look back at the spot directly in front of you. Then, again without moving your head, look downward as far as your eyes allow, and find something you can clearly focus on and spot each time you look down. Then look back at the spot directly in front of you. Tracing as straight a line as possible with your eyes, alternately look up and down, finding the spots you've picked out, including the one directly in front of you. Do this ten to twelve times, deliberately and at a moderate to slow pace.

Next, without moving your head, look to the left as far as your eyes allow, and find something you can clearly focus on and spot each time you look left. Then look back at the spot directly in front of you. Again without moving your head, look to the right as far as your eyes allow, and find something you can clearly focus on and spot each time you look right. Then look back at the spot directly in front of you. Tracing as straight a line as possible with your eyes, alternately look left and right, finding the spots you've picked out, including the one directly in front of you. Do this ten to twelve times, deliberately and at a moderate to slow pace.

Next, without moving your head, look diagonally up to the left as far as your eyes allow, and find something you can clearly focus on and spot each time you look left. Then look back at the spot directly in front of you. Then, again without moving your head, look diagonally down to the right as far as your eyes allow, and find something you can clearly focus on and spot each time you look right. Then look back at the spot directly in front of you. Tracing as straight a line as possible with your eyes, alternately look up to the left and down to the right, finding the spots you've picked out, including the one directly in front of you. Do this ten to twelve times, deliberately and at a moderate to slow pace. Then reverse the directions, looking up to the right and down to the left for the same number of times.

Finally, make circles with your eyes. You can start with either clockwise or counterclockwise circles. Here, you won't be looking at the spot directly in front of you, but you can locate the other eight spots you selected in the previous exercises as you circle your eyes, again to ensure the most uniform eye movement possible. After circling your eyes ten to twelve times in one direction, reverse the direction of the circles for the same number of times.

This exercises the muscles that move your eyeballs. Those muscles attach all around

the sides and rear of the eye, and allow for all the movements your eyes can make. The Chinese consider eyes that are capable of free, quick movement to be a sign of intelligence. As with any muscle, the ability to move freely and without pain requires the nourishment of blood and the qi and other nutrients it contains. Since the backs of the eyes connect almost directly with the brain, more blood drawn to that area benefits the brain as well. If you feel tenderness or discomfort as you move your eyes in any direction, it indicates that the muscles responsible for that movement are weak or tight, and they will get achy in the same way any other muscle will when weak or tight.

Place some attention on your breathing as you do these eye exercises. While you don't have to breathe in any particular way, you may find that you hold your breath for some or all of these exercises. The Liver is responsible for the smooth flow of qi throughout the body. An unconsciously held breath indicates a disruption in qi flow, and smooth, deep breaths promote an unobstructed course. Do your best to keep your breathing even and regular throughout this exercise in particular.

4A. Eye Focus Exercise

This is not, to the best of my knowledge, specifically a Chinese exercise, but it is a type of continuation of the previous exercise. Our eyes focus because there are very tiny muscles that contract and relax to pull on the lenses within each eye. That pulling and relaxing makes the lens more convex or less convex, when viewed from the front, allowing for near and far focus. Now, the lens itself may harden some over time, becoming less flexible, but to whatever extent it remains supple, the strength of the muscles that shape the lens determines our clarity of focus. These days, most people spend too much time indoors, working with computers and other devices up close, so there's less opportunity to exercise those small muscles beyond that narrow range. This focus exercise helps to remedy that, and may improve vision with practice over time.

Before sitting in a chair as above, place a magazine or newspaper, something with relatively large print of differing sizes, open to any page with such print propped upright at one end of the room. Place your chair at a distance where you can read the print when covering either eye. Hold a paperback book, a newspaper, magazine, matchbook cover, anything with small print, in your left hand, and sit in the chair. Cover your right eye with your right hand, and with your left eye, look at the printed page at the far end of the room. Clearly focus on the smallest size of print that you can read. Then lift your left hand to just below the height of your left eye, and hold the book or printed material as close to that eye as you can and still be able to clearly read print on that item. Shift your focus back and forth between the near and far print, making sure you can clearly read the letters you are looking at. Shift your focus back and forth ten to twelve times. Then place the book in your right hand, cover your left eye with your left hand, and repeat the exercise with your right eye. You may need to focus on larger print, or hold the book

farther away, when using your other eye. That's okay; just pick a the smallest print size you can read, and the closest distance you can focus on.

After a few weeks of daily practice, you may find you can read more clearly, possibly even not needing glasses to read things you would have in the past. All the other benefits of the previous exercise apply here on a finer, more subtle scale, as we are working with even smaller physiological structures.

5. Eye Cupping

This is another exercise that can be done anywhere and anytime, to soothe tired, overworked eyes. In the context of this set of eye exercises, doing it at the end of the practice will comfort eyes that have just been worked in some unfamiliar ways.

Sitting or standing, rub your hands together until they are comfortably warm. The friction from rubbing your hands together generates that warmth, which then dilates the blood vessels and brings more blood to your hands. Supportively, the increased blood in your hands makes them warmer still. People adept at the practice of qigong can make their hands warm just by using their mind to direct the qi there. In Chinese medicine, there is a saying: "The Qi is the commander of the Blood, but the Blood is the mother of the Qi." This means that qi, energy, is required to move the blood wherever it goes in the body, and that wherever there is more blood, there can be more qi, since qi requires healthy blood as a medium from which to grow and flourish. Even if you can't feel qi, more is present in your hands after rubbing them together to bring blood there. Now, place the palms of your hands over your eyes, and let the warmth penetrate your eyes. That warmth is an aspect of qi, so more qi will penetrate your eyes at the same time, helping them to become more comfortable and healthy.

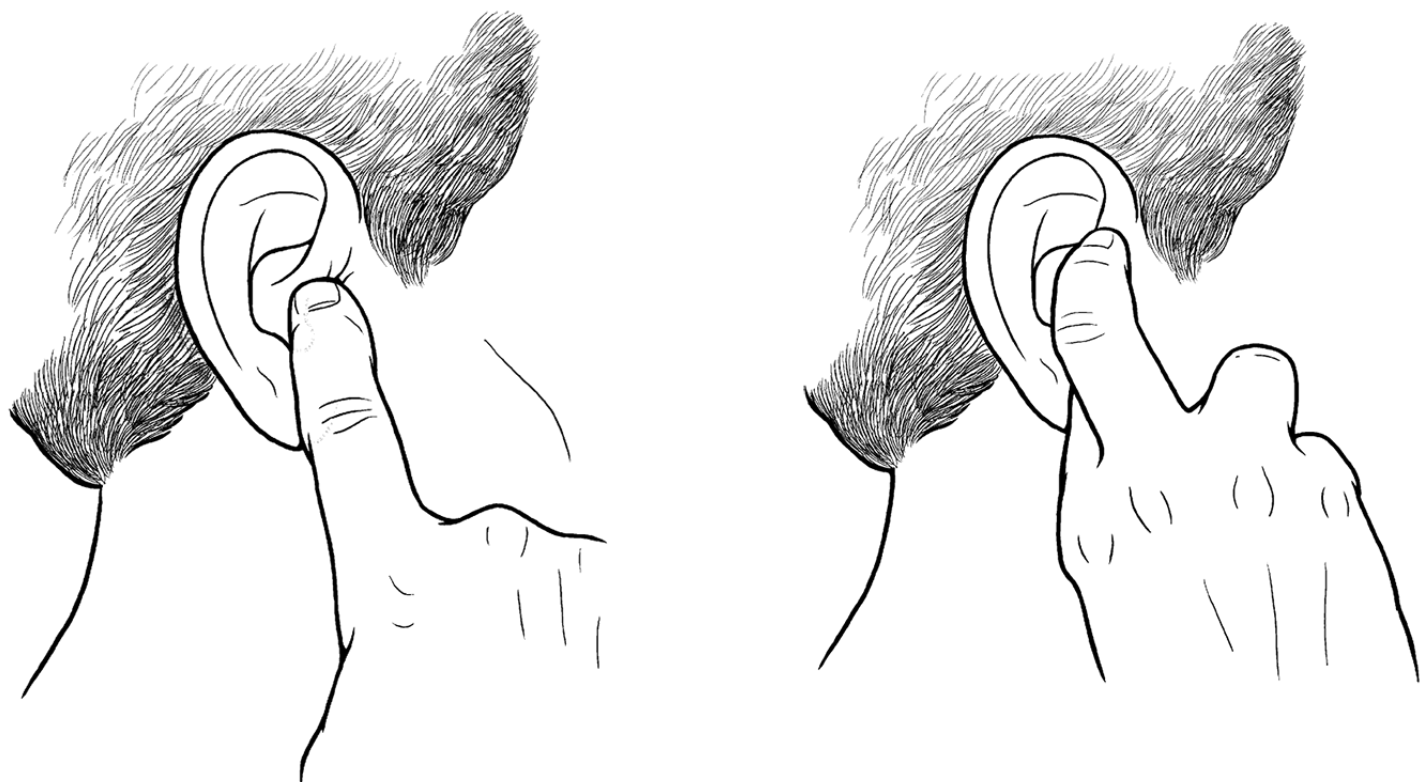
If you have trouble understanding this from the standpoint of Chinese energetics, consider it from a basic scientific standpoint. If you were to observe your hands using night vision goggles, which detect infrared radiation, you would see that your hands appear brighter, as they are giving off more infrared radiation in the form of heat. All biological energy is qi, and the infrared radiation generated by your body is just one part of that biological energy, one part of your qi.

Ear Exercises

6. Beating the Heavenly Drum

Moving down from the eyes, the next sense organs addressed are the ears. These exercises will help keep your ears healthy and your hearing strong well into old age. The ears are the sense organs associated with the Kidneys, so any problems you have with your ears may reflect a problem with Kidney function, any benefit to your ears will benefit your Kidneys, and exercises found elsewhere in this book that benefit your Kidneys will benefit your ears as well.

Beating the Heavenly Drum makes use of a gentle paidagong, a tapping and patting technique used in various exercises throughout this book that breaks up stagnant qi and stimulates local qi flow. It is commonly practiced in two different but related ways. The first way is the simplest, and getting the sense of the Heavenly Drum here will make it easier to get the Heavenly Drum in the second approach. Sitting comfortably, place the tips of your index fingers on the small triangular flap of cartilage and skin directly in front of your ear canal. Push that flap firmly so that it fully closes the opening to your ear, and hold it in place there (**Fig 8.4A**). Use your middle fingers to tap on the fingernail of your index fingers, so that you hear a drumlike beat within your ear (**Fig 8.4B**). Keep the beats as even as possible, and tap thirty-six times. (**Fig 8.4C**).



Figures 8.4A and 8.4B (Beating the Heavenly Drum)

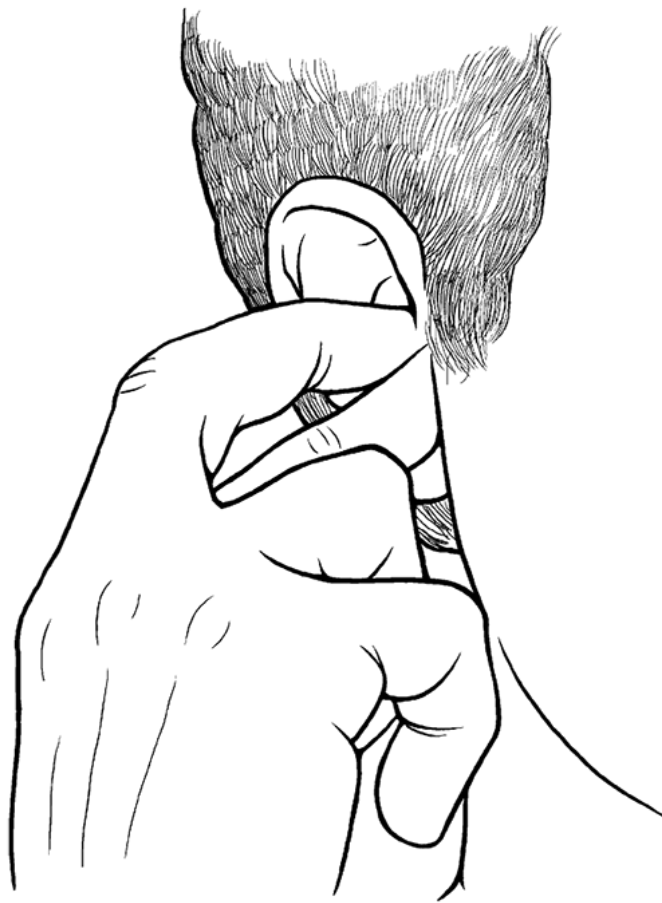


Figure 8.4C (Beating the Heavenly Drum)



Figure 8.5A (Beating the Heavenly Drum)



Figure 8.5B (Beating the Heavenly Drum)



Figure 8.5C (Beating the Heavenly Drum)

In the second variation of the Heavenly Drum, getting that drum beat sound can be a little trickier, but once you have some experience with the first variation, you know what to look for. Here, place the palms of each hand over each ear, with your fingertips curling rearward to the back of your head. Your middle fingers should lie just at the lower ridge of your occiput, the base of your skull (**Fig 8.5A**), so that your index fingers will touch the skin and muscle just below, at the very top of your neck. Keeping your palms over your ears and your little, ring, and middle fingers firmly in contact with your skull (thumbs can touch your neck or hang down freely), place your index fingers directly on top of your middle fingers (**Fig 8.5B**), and then flick them with just a little force so that they tap your upper neck (**Fig 8.5C**). You should hear the same drum beat when doing this as you heard in the first variation, although possibly less sharp or at a slightly lower pitch. The Urinary Bladder (UB) meridian runs exactly under the spot the tips of your index finger will tap when doing this variation, so you will get an extra benefit from that. The UB is the Yang organ paired with the Yin Kidneys. The UB meridian runs down your back in

parallel lines flanking your spine and directly overlays the Kidneys, so stimulating qi flow there helps release obstruction along your back, useful as an adjunct to reduce back pain, and offers more direct stimulation of the kidneys. As with the first variation, tap thirty-six times.

7. Ear Pop

In addition to its Kidney correspondence, the ear has direct connections with three Yang meridians: the Small Intestine, the Gall Bladder, and the Sanjiao. This simple exercise stimulates those meridians (whose local points are used to treat various ear problems) while simultaneously freeing up the small physical structures just within and surrounding the ear. The slight vacuum this creates can also help dislodge waxy buildup within the ear. Even in the absence of any known hearing problems, those factors combine to sharpen the sense of hearing, and generally make your ears feel good.

Insert your little fingers into each ear, deeply enough so that your ears feel blocked and your hearing is reduced, but not so deep that you feel uncomfortable pressure on your eardrums. Then make circles with your little fingers, directing the force of the circles toward the wall of the ear canal and not toward your eardrums. You should feel the ear canal move. If there are any adhesions surrounding your ear canal, you may hear a slight crackling as they are freed. This should not cause any pain. Make twelve circles forward, and then twelve circles backward. Then curl your little fingers slightly, so they make even more firm contact with the ear canals, and quickly pull them out of your ears, producing a soft popping sound. If you've dislodged any ear wax, the suction will help pull it from your ears.

Nose Exercises

8. Friction Massage to Sides of the Nose

The nose is the sense organ associated with the Lungs. This simple exercise helps with breathing problems, clears the sinuses, improves the sense of smell, and brings more qi and blood to the nose in preparation for the next exercise. Especially when combined with the next exercise, this also benefits the throat, which is the passageway between nose and lungs, and reduces the occurrence and severity of colds and flus.

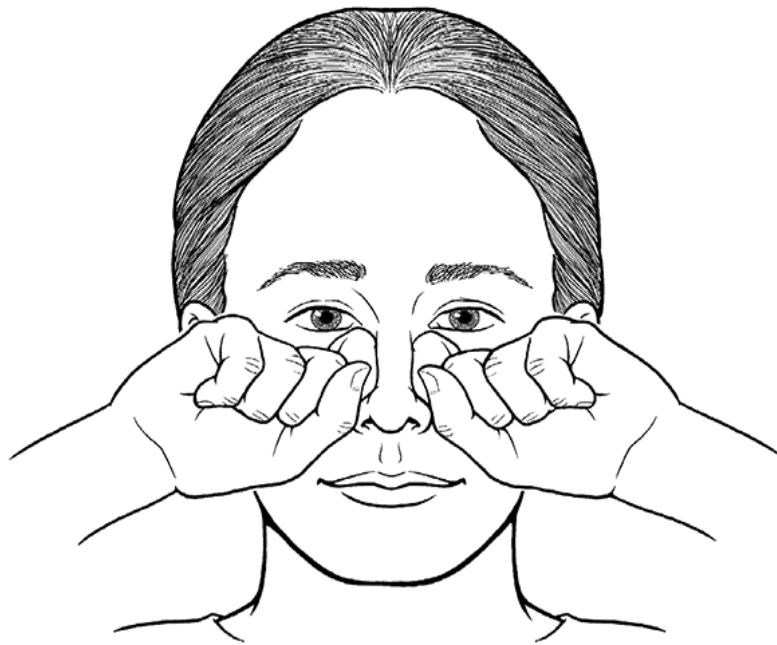


Figure 8.6 (Friction Massage to Sides of the Nose)

Step 1: Different Chinese teachers have slightly different preferred hand and finger positions for this. The results are very similar, but each position produces its own variation and places a slightly different emphasis on different parts of the nose, stimulating those areas to a greater or lesser degree. Experiment with both of these and see which you like best. Choose either one to start with, and feel free to alternate them at will.

Hand Position 1: For the first hand position, make a loose fist, and open your index finger just enough so that you can place the pad of your thumb on the fingernail of your index finger. Flanking your nose, place the backs of your index fingers on your cheeks, so that the knuckle of your index fingers are near or at the bridge of your nose, and the sides of your index fingers are touching the sides of your nose (**Fig 8.6**).

Hand Position 2: For the second hand position, keep your hands fully opened with your thumbs out at, or near, right angles to your hand. Placing your thumbs under your jaw, lay your index fingers at the sides of your nose so that the palm surface of the index fingers contact your nose, while the near sides of your index fingers, the side of the index fingers closest to your thumbs, touch your cheek at the sides of your nose (**Fig 8.7**). In this illustration, the middle, ring, and little fingers are folded to better show the index finger position.

Step 2: Using either hand position, rub your index fingers up and down briskly along the sides of your nose, for ten to thirty seconds. Hand position 1 will create a little more external friction and warmth on the surface of your skin, and naturally stimulate the points closer to the bridge of your nose. You can stimulate the points closer to the tip of your nose if you make sure to move your knuckles down that low. Hand position 2 doesn't create much external friction, since your index fingers remain in firmer contact with your skin, with less sliding on the surface. This position will naturally free up the mucus

membranes inside your nose a little better. Both bring qi and blood to your nose equally well, and both stimulate the points flanking your nose.

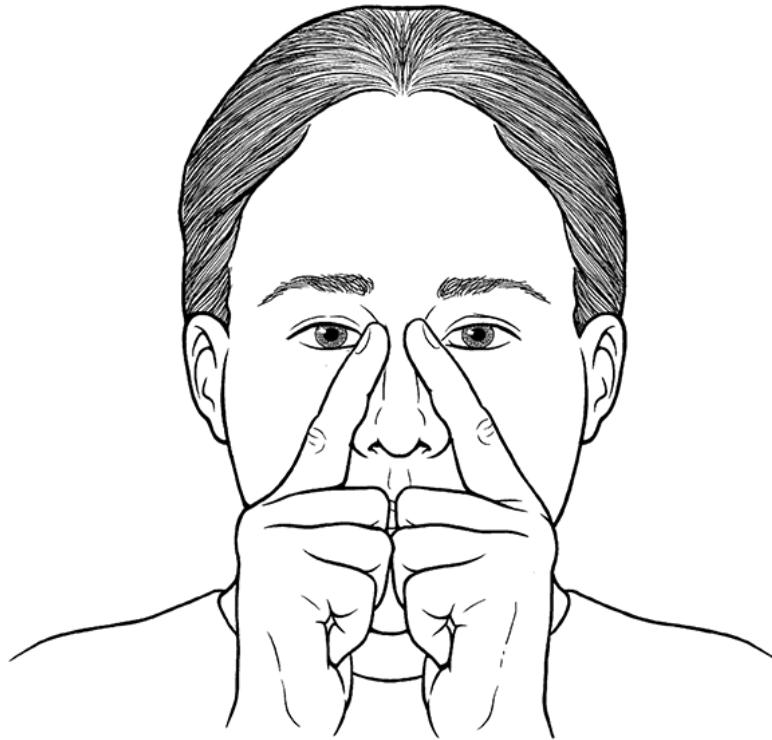


Figure 8.7 (Friction Massage to Sides of the Nose)

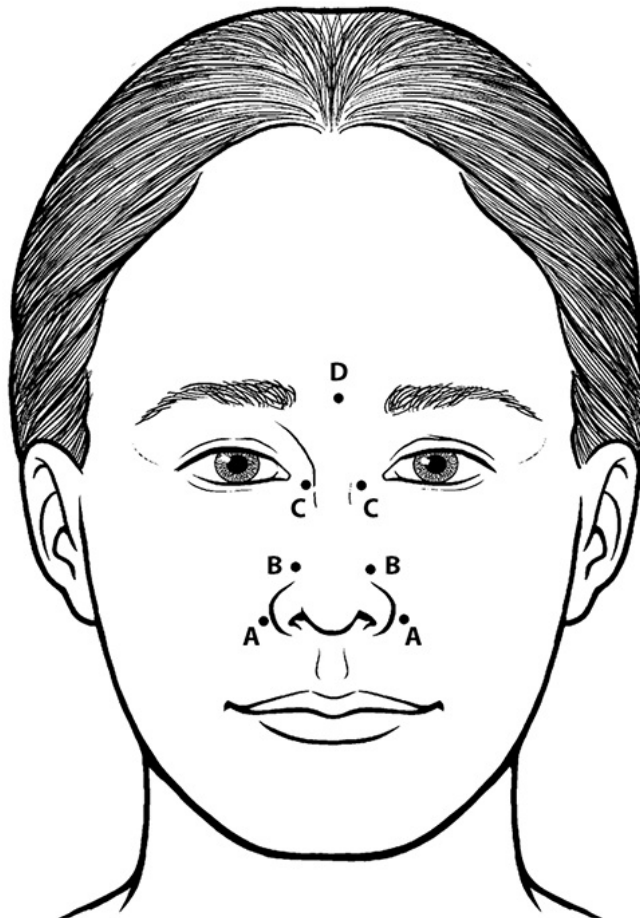


Figure 8.8A–8.8D (Seven Point Nasal Acupressure Massage)

9. Seven Point Nasal Acupressure Massage

This exercise picks up where the previous one left off. Now that you have more qi and blood at your nose, stimulating the local acupuncture points with direct finger pressure will have an even greater effect.

Locate the acupoints in this way. The first pair of points are just to the sides of your nostrils. If you place both index fingers at the very tip of your nose and slide them outwards along your nostrils until they reach where your nose joins your face (cheeks), your fingertips will come to rest on the first points (**Fig 8.8A**). If you press straight in, you'll feel a slight depression in the bone there. Because your fingertips are much wider than an acupuncture needle, you'll be covering two acupoints at the same time, Large Intestine 20 (the Chinese name translates as "Welcome Fragrance") and just slightly below, Large Intestine 19. Both points are used traditionally to clear the lungs, decongest the nose, open the channel locally, and helps to dispel the invasion of pathogenic factors that can cause a cold—in this case, primarily Wind.

The second pair of points flank the nose slightly higher up, near where the cartilage ends and the nasal bone begins. Pressing toward the bones of your face (as opposed to toward your nose), you will feel another bony depression (**Fig 8.8B** on previous page). This corresponds to the extra acupoint called Bitong, sometimes referred to as Upper Large Intestine 20, and translates as "Penetrating the Nose" or "Nose Passage." In addition to traditionally clearing heat and dispelling wind in order to treat nasal diseases and improve overall nose function, it also benefits the eyes and sharpens eyesight.

The third pair of points are located at the bridge of the nose, at the height of the inner corner of the eyes. Direct your finger pressure toward the bridge of your nose to feel the bony indentation there (**Fig 8.8C** on previous page). This is close to, but not exactly on, Urinary Bladder 1, another point used to clear heat and sharpen eyesight. Because your finger pressure is directed toward your nose, these points benefit nasal function as well.

The final location is a single point above the nose, between the eyebrows, on the centerline of the brow (**Fig 8.8D** on previous page). This point is commonly referred to as "the third eye," and its Chinese name, Yintang, is translated as "Seal Hall" or "Hall of Impression." Traditionally the point is used to clear wind and reduce pain, benefiting the eyes and nose. In spiritual traditions, it represents and enhances wisdom and enlightenment.

There are two basic approaches to stimulating these points. If you have nasal problems (congestion, a stuffy or runny nose, sneezing, etc.), here's how to determine the approach that's best for you. If you have chronic nasal problems, allergies, and/or you are typically tired or run-down, your nasal problems are most likely due to an underlying deficiency. In that case, treat the points starting at the tip of your nose and work up to Yintang. While the function of the individual points will still clear wind and heat as well as

open your nasal passages, you'll be directing healthy qi from the air inward, to build and strengthen your body at the same time. If your nose is congested due to an acute cold or flu, external pathogens are creating a temporary local excess, and in order to best clear that out, treat the points starting from Yintang and work toward the tip of your nose. If you are generally healthy and just want to address your nose and lungs as part of an overall health maintenance protocol, stimulating the points from the tip of your nose toward Yintang will be best for most people, but feel free to experiment and see what feels best to you.

To stimulate the points, apply firm, steady pressure to each pair of points for about ten seconds, and then move to the next one in whichever direction you've selected. At Yintang, you can use a single index finger, or place the tip of one index finger over the other if you feel a need for stronger stimulation. Repeat this sequence three times. You can do this two, three, or even more times throughout the day. That's a good idea if you are experiencing any sinus problems.

You may feel some initial discomfort when pressing on any or all of these points. That indicates there is local stagnation, of qi or blood. If you want to disperse that stagnation first, you can make small circling motions with your fingertips as you apply pressure. It may still take a number of days of regular treatment for the discomfort to completely disperse, so don't be discouraged if it doesn't stop right away.

Mouth Exercises

10. Teeth Clicking and Tapping

This is the first of three exercises for the mouth. Because the teeth are considered to be extensions of bones and bones are the body tissue associated with the Kidneys, this practice will benefit the Kidneys as well as the teeth and gums. It's a type of paidagong and as such will disperse qi stagnation locally while stimulating blood flow around the roots of the teeth. Because it's practiced in a focused manner, it has the potential to strengthen and harden the teeth in the same way focused weight-bearing exercises can increase bone density in other parts of the body.

Simply click your teeth together, firmly enough to hear the tapping audibly. Unless you have some untreated tooth decay or infection, you should not feel any pain or discomfort from this. While I've never heard of anyone chipping a tooth from this practice, take care not to be so vigorous that you may cause that type of damage. Do your best to ensure that all your teeth tap together for at least part of the practice. If your teeth don't align perfectly (few people's do), you will need to emphasize different portions of your mouth at different times to affect all of your teeth. The traditional number of clicks is thirty-six, and it's okay to do more if you'd like.

11. Tongue Circles the Teeth/Red Dragon Dances

The tongue is the organ most responsible for our sense of taste. Chinese medicine also recognizes its connection to the Heart, and the two organs are associated. This relationship may be most easily understood if we consider the use of the tongue in deep kissing, which stimulates heart-centered feelings of romantic love. The Chinese also believe the heart to be the seat of consciousness, so the tongue is used to express and communicate all manner of ideas and heartfelt emotions, aiding in creating a relational connection between all people.

In this first of two related exercises, sometimes called Red Dragon Dances (the tongue being likened to a red dragon; red is the color associated with the fire element, and so with the Heart), the tongue is exercised so more blood is drawn to it, which benefits the heart; saliva is generated, cleansing the tongue to improve the sense of taste, and is further used in the following exercise; and the mind is gently stimulated, refreshing thought and by extension the other senses.

Place your tongue anywhere on the outside surface of your teeth, between your teeth and lips. Circle your tongue clockwise or counterclockwise around the outer surface of all of your teeth, doing your best to make sure your tongue touches every tooth. Do this twelve times in one direction, and then reverse direction for another twelve times. This is usually enough to generate an ample amount of saliva. Hold this saliva in your mouth and do not swallow it. If there's not much saliva, you can repeat this another twelve times in each direction. Now you're ready to do the second exercise.

12. Saliva Swish and Swallow

Saliva is an extremely useful fluid produced in the salivary glands around the mouth. It begins the process of digestion, both by providing a liquid medium in which to dissolve food substances, and because it contains the enzyme amylase, which breaks down starchy carbohydrates. It is mildly antibacterial, containing the enzyme lysozyme, which breaks down (lyses) many types of bacteria and other microbes. It is alkalizing, which also inhibits bacterial proliferation and neutralizes acidity, helping to reduce the formation of cavities in the teeth. Additionally, it is one type of Jing essence, a nutritional and qi-rich substance as understood by Chinese medicine. All in all, saliva is a wonderful body fluid, more remarkable than most people know.

Using the saliva you collected in Red Dragon Dances, swish that around your mouth like you might any mouthwash. It's actually more healthy than any mouthwash you can buy. Doing this will clean your teeth, gums, and tongue. Swishing for the traditional number of thirty-six times, you will likely collect even more saliva than what you began with. Because of all its healthful properties, you don't want to spit it out, but rather swallow it instead, allowing you to absorb those healthful benefits. You could swallow it all at once, and you'll get all the physical benefits from doing that, but there's another option if you want to aid your mind to tune in to the related energetics.

This is guidance I often give to my students in qigong and taiji classes, when they are learning to feel their Dantian, the main energy center having to do with all physical form and function. For many people, the Dantian can be difficult to feel in earlier stages of practice, but most find that this makes it much easier. Sit or stand still, quiet your mind, and mentally divide the saliva into approximate thirds. Swallow one third, and feel it travel down toward and then to your stomach. The physical saliva will stop there, of course, but because it is a Jing essence and contains qi, the energy continues down the centerline of your body all the way to the Dantian. You can feel a subtle yet distinct “thunk” as it reaches the Dantian, a couple of inches below your navel. Repeat this two more times, with the second and third thirds of your saliva. That reinforces your perception of your Dantian, making it easier to find the next time, eventually making it easy to feel using your mind alone at any time. This optional practice is only for people interested in working with their qi, and not necessary for the basic physical benefits to happen.

Closing Exercise

13. Face Wash and Wipe Down

This is a necessary concluding step to be done after the preceding face, head, and sense organ exercises. The daily lives of most people bring excessive amounts of qi to the head, because of the overuse of the eyes in particular, reading, working at a computer, and watching television. Listening to music or lectures throughout the day, and being involved in any sort of mental work similarly brings a lot of qi to the head, and care must be taken to remove that qi, or it can, and often does, get stuck and create a variety of problems. Some of those problems may include headache, eye strain, diminished vision, ringing in the ears, cloudy thinking, memory problems, or any number of other sensory, emotional, or cognitive changes. Most of the exercises in this section are designed in part to disperse any such excess, but it's not an absolute guarantee, especially in someone conditioned to bring qi upward out of daily habit, so this Wipe Down is an important final step.

Begin by rubbing your hands together as you did for the Eye Cupping exercise above, for the same reasons given there. Then rub your hands over your face as though you were washing it, using just enough pressure to move the muscles under your skin. This activates the qi and moves the blood, in no particular direction, just stirring and breaking up any pockets of stagnation that might be present. Do this for just a few minutes, being sure to wash over every area of your face, neck, and head. Then place your hands at the top of your head, keep them in physical contact with your body, and wipe down the front of your face, neck, chest, and belly, to just below your belly button. Bring them to the top of your head once more, and wipe down the sides of your head, over your ears, the sides

of your neck, and then again down the front of your chest and belly, to just below your belly button. Bring your hands to the top of your head one last time, and wipe down the back of your head and neck, and then again down the front of your chest and belly, to just below your belly button. You can do this sequence one to three times, more or less to taste. On the last time, leave your hands just below your belly button for a minute or so, and allow your mind to gently focus and settle there. The wiping-down motion will bring the qi out of your head and into your body, which is the most important part of this ending practice. Even if you can't sense qi at all, placing your hands just below your belly button and focusing your mind there will direct your qi to your Dantian. To whatever extent you may be able to store qi, even unconsciously, this will facilitate that process.

[contents]

Nine

Glands

Within the scope of this book, the simplest and most direct way to affect and benefit most of the glands involves one technique, paidagong tapping and patting; not much explanation will be necessary. The few exceptions are included in the descriptions that follow. Glandular health is very important, and it is seldom (if ever) addressed in more conventional exercise and self-care systems.

Glandular secretions affect every aspect of human functioning through all stages of life from birth to death. If we additionally understand glandular secretions to be Jing essences, we can extend that to say that we are influenced by them from the moment of conception, and perhaps even earlier than that. The range of influence includes growth, development, cellular repair and regeneration (and by extension, how quickly and how well we age), sexuality and procreation, immune support, metabolism, energy production, nutrient utilization, emotional balance, mental perception, everything that is hormonally regulated, and many things that have no obvious hormonal correlation. Consequently, maintaining glandular health is of utmost importance.

1. Pineal Tap

The pineal gland is about the size of a pea. It's located near the center of the brain, between the two brain hemispheres. It converts nerve signals from the sympathetic system into hormone signals, establishing a connection between the endocrine and nervous systems. Among other things, it secretes melatonin, which regulates sleep/wake cycles and plays a role in sexual development. Readers with a spiritual or metaphysical orientation know that it is associated with the upper Dantian from a Chinese perspective, or the sixth chakra in Indian spiritual philosophy. Its awakening is linked to spiritual development and increased psychic awareness and ability.

Using either or both the index and middle fingers singly, simultaneously, or alternating, tap the region directly between your eyebrows, at the point colloquially referred to as the third eye. Although the pineal gland is near the center of the brain, there is an energy pathway that connects directly to it from the external third eye, which is exactly why it's a popular point of focus in many meditation practices. You may feel a bony indentation

there, or you may not. The tapping should be gentle and even, and it should produce a pleasant sensation, almost like a very mild tickle.

Tap for just a minute or two. There is no set number of taps. Remember that you want to make incremental improvement over time. Trying to do it all at once by tapping for a long time will not work, and will in fact be counterproductive. Whether or not one does energy practices, this is a region where qi easily gets stuck. One common manifestation of that is a headache in that location. Overthinking, worry, and overuse of the eyes, as well as energy practices that bring energy up the body but incompletely circulate it back down (either by design or by practitioner error or inexperience) are just a few things that can cause qi to get stuck there.

2. Pituitary and Hypothalamus Tap

The pituitary gland is located at the base of the brain between the optic nerves, in front of the spinal cord. This small endocrine organ is often called the “Master Gland” because it directs other endocrine glands, to suppress or induce their hormone production. One of its most well-known hormone secretions, human growth hormone (HGH), is involved with cellular growth and repair, as well as regulating the activity of other glands, and is thought by many to be our internal “fountain of youth.” High circulating levels of HGH halts and may even reverse many of the signs of aging. The pituitary also acts on the muscles and kidneys, and stores some of the hormones produced by the hypothalamus.

The hypothalamus lies just below the thalamus (a relay center for sensory and motor pathways in the brain), deeply buried in the brain, near the center of the cranial cavity. It has a special structural and functional relationship with the pituitary gland, which dangles below it, attached by a thin stalk of nerve fibers and blood vessel connections.

It is the control center for many autonomic functions of the peripheral nervous system. Connections with structures of the endocrine and nervous systems enable the hypothalamus to play a vital role in maintaining homeostasis, regulating body temperature, blood pressure, and heart rate. It influences ovarian and testicular function, mood and behavior, sleep cycles, energy levels, and general metabolism. Sometimes called “the brain of the brain,” almost everything the hypothalamus does relates to the management of brain and body connection, linking the mind to the body. Because of their very close anatomical location and some functional interdependence, this exercise addresses the pituitary and hypothalamus at the same time.

The easiest way to do this tap is to take more of a “ray gun” approach, sending a relatively large wave through the head. There are more narrow, focused methods, but this way is very effective and anyone can do it. Make loose, soft fists with each hand, and at the back of the head, tap the base of the skull, just below the bone and close to either side of the neck vertebrae. You can use either the knuckle side of the four fingers at the front of each hand (**Fig 9.1** on next page), or for a slightly more directed focus, the little

finger side of each fist (**Fig 9.2** on next page). You can hold your head completely upright, or incline it slightly forward if that gives you easier access to the base of your skull. Alternate hand taps rapidly, and direct the force of your right hand toward your left eye, and your left hand toward your right eye. That will ensure that the wave travels through both the pituitary gland and the hypothalamus. You may also feel a more diffuse wave traveling through most or all of the rest of your head. That's normal and provides some secondary benefit. An additional secondary benefit is this will soften and relax the tight neck muscles that most people have at the juncture of the head and back of the neck.

Tap for just a minute or two. There is no set number of taps. Remember that you want to make incremental improvement over time. Trying to do it all at once by tapping for a long time will not work, and will in fact be counterproductive.

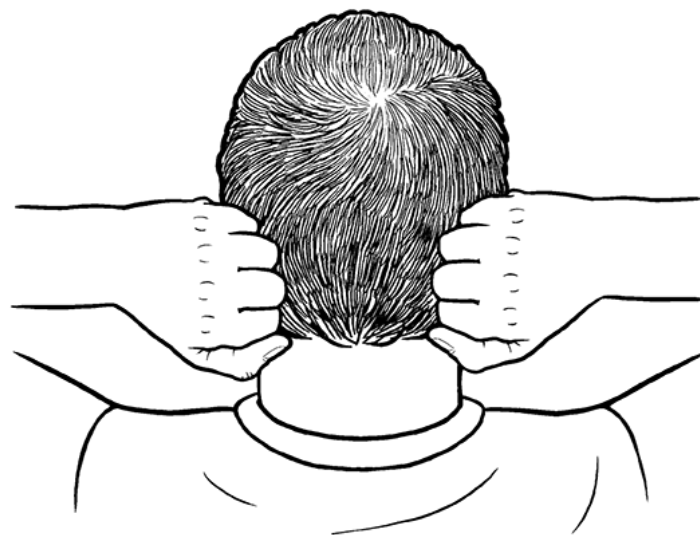


Figure 9.1 (Pituitary and Hypothalamus Tap)



Figure 9.2 (Pituitary and Hypothalamus Tap)

3. Thyroid Massage

The thyroid is a butterfly-shaped gland that sits low on the front of the neck, below your Adam's apple, along the front of the windpipe. It secretes several thyroid hormones.

Thyroid hormones act throughout the body, influencing metabolism, growth and development, and body temperature. It is crucial for brain development in infancy and childhood; in adults it facilitates the functioning of the nervous, cardiovascular, and gastrointestinal systems. This massage will additionally benefit the parathyroid glands, four pea-sized bodies located behind the thyroid gland. They increase calcium levels in the blood, helping to maintain bone quality and an adequate supply of calcium needed for muscle movement and signal transmission within the cells.

Energetically, there are a number of acupoints along the front of the neck, on the Stomach and Large Intestine meridians. With its paired Yin organ, the Spleen, the Stomach influences gastrointestinal and muscle function. The Large Intestine's paired Yin organ is the Lungs. Lungs and Spleen are involved in metabolism, notably in the areas of energy production. This dovetails with comparable thyroid functions. The base of the throat is also the seat of the fifth chakra, which has to do with communication, self-expression, and creativity as it relates to communicating self-expression. Honest communication and self-expression are often discouraged and suppressed in our culture, in the workplace and even at home, so the throat is another area where qi will frequently become stuck.

Since the front of the neck is more sensitive and less well protected by thick muscle or bone, this exercise is not a paidagong, but a type of massage done in three stages. For the purpose of this exercise, the designations of "right hand, left hand" are arbitrary, and you can reverse them if you are more comfortable doing so.

Place the thumb and index finger of your left hand at the base of your throat, directly on your collarbone, to the outside of the bony bumps you will feel there. Gripping the base of your neck and collarbones lightly, exert some downward pressure on your collarbones. Place your right hand directly over your left, right thumb over left index finger, right index finger over left thumb. Gently but firmly grasp the sides of your throat, and slide your right hand up, stretching your throat until your fingers reach the inside of your jawbone (**Fig 9.3** on next page). You will feel the sides of the base of your tongue there. Push gently upward for a couple of seconds. Repeat this stretch and lift your throat two more times.

After the third repetition, keep your right hand just below your jaw, and remove your left hand to begin the second part of this exercise. Now you can add the middle and ring fingers of your right hand to get a better grip on your throat. Starting just below your jaw, move your throat side to side, just enough so you can clearly feel it move back and forth a few times. You should not feel any pain, and you should not feel like you are choking yourself. Then move your hand downward a bit, and repeat. Depending on the size of your hand and length of your neck, you may be able to divide your throat into three, four, or five regions as you move it side to side one region at a time. You might feel or hear

small crunching sounds as bound tissue is released. You may feel a slight tickle in your throat prompting you to cough. Both of those reactions are normal. One pass down your neck is usually enough, but if you want to do this two or three times, that's okay too.



Figure 9.3 (Thyroid Massage)

The last part of this exercise is direct point massage. Most of these points are not standard acupoints, since needles are directed into the portion of the meridians that are in the muscle and not into the throat itself. Here, you will use your thumb and index finger like a pincer, directing force toward the sides of, and whenever possible just behind, your throat. From the previous two exercises, you will have felt small ridges at the sides of your throat. Starting at the top of your throat, use your thumb and index finger to press into the space between two of those ridges. Use light to moderate pressure only. You only want to make a solid enough contact so that you can physically move the tissue below your fingertips. When you have that contact, make small circling motions with your fingers, ten times in one direction, and then ten times in the opposite direction. Then move your fingers down to the next space you are able to feel between the ridges and repeat. Continue down the neck in this way until you get to the base of your throat.

Caution: In men and women, when you get to the level of the thyroid cartilage, the prominent Adam's apple in men, there will be more of a bony feeling. In fact there is a bone just above the thyroid cartilage, called the hyoid bone, which is flexible yet delicate, so take care in any bony region you feel. Sometimes tilting your head back slightly will open your neck enough to feel for the depression between ridges there too, but you may need to skip over that region entirely. Do not put direct pressure on any bony protrusion you may encounter.

4. Thymus Tap

The thymus is a gland composed of lymphatic tissue, located in the upper central chest, behind the sternum (breastbone), midway between top of the heart and the sternal notch at the base of the throat. It is most active in youth, enlarging until puberty, at which time it begins to shrink. In recent years, it has come to be recognized as still important through adulthood. The thymus forms part of the immune system, transforming lymphocytes (white blood cells that develop in the bone marrow), into T-cells. These cells are then transported to various lymph glands, where they play an important role in fighting infections and disease. The thymus also produces hormones that regulate T-cell maturation. The Thymus Tap stimulates this gland, helping to keep it functionally active throughout later adult years.

Make a soft fist with either hand, and thump your upper chest on your breastbone, below your throat notch and above your heart. Vary the rhythm and speed, and within comfortable limits, even the strength of the thump. The body tends to adapt to any repetitive stimulus, eventually "ignoring" it. Varying the rate, rhythm, and strength makes this unlikely. Do this for just a minute or two each day.

5. Kidney/Adrenal Tap

The adrenals are a pair of triangular glands about one to two inches long, that sit on each of the kidneys in the low back. They secrete more than three dozen hormones directly into the bloodstream. The outer region takes its instructions from the pituitary hormone ACTH, and secretes steroid hormones such as cortisone and testosterone, which have important effects on the way energy is stored and utilized, on sexuality, and on many aspects of blood chemistry. The smaller, inner region is part of the sympathetic nervous system and responds to physical and emotional stress. Reacting to fear, anger, or perceived emergency, it produces epinephrine and norepinephrine (adrenaline and noradrenaline), which are sometimes called "fight or flight" hormones.

The kidneys are bean-shaped organs about the size of a fist, located in the lower back on each side of the vertebrae. They filter toxins from the blood and excrete them as urine. They also filter out normal substances from the blood when they are present in greater than normal concentrations, as a means of maintaining homeostasis. The kidney is an endocrine gland itself, secreting the hormones erythropoietin, involved in the formation of red blood cells, and calcitriol, the active form of vitamin D.

The kidneys are commonly damaged by diabetes and high blood pressure, two diseases that are very prevalent in modern cultures. While this exercise won't repair existing damage, it can help to prevent it from occurring, as well as support kidney and adrenal health overall.



Figure 9.4 (Kidney/Adrenal Tap)

This paidagong can be done standing, but may be more comfortable when practiced sitting, on the floor or on a chair or stool. Make soft fists with both hands, and with either the thumb and index finger sides of the fists (**Fig 9.4**), or the backs of the fists (**Fig 9.5** on next page), tap your low back, from your lowest rib to just above your pelvis. Many people have low back tension, discomfort, or pain, and this tap can be surprisingly soothing. A hundred taps on each kidney will only take about a minute, and is the recommended daily minimum for this practice. You can do this for a few minutes longer if you like. The kidneys are sensitive organs, so while you do want to vary the rate and rhythm of the taps, take care not to tap too hard.

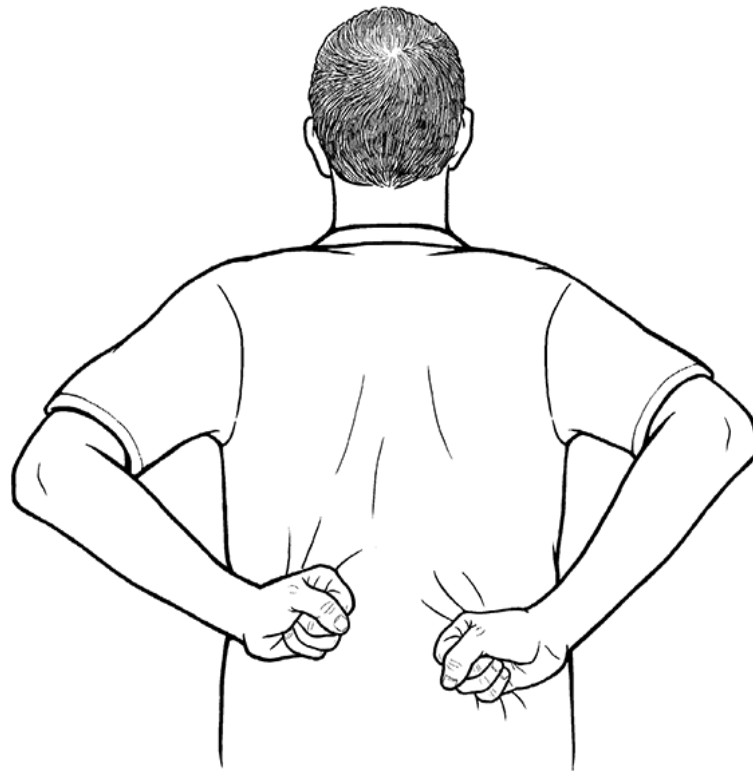


Figure 9.5 (Kidney/Adrenal Tap)

6. Kidney Massage

In all aspects of Chinese medicine, it's standard practice to first dispel any pathogenic influence, and then bring in healthy qi to rebuild, repair, or restore normal function to the affected organ/meridian system(s). The Kidney/Adrenal Tap above disperses stagnant qi, and under most circumstances should be practiced before the Kidney Massage. The Kidney Massage is soothing, nourishing, and warming; settles the qi that was stirred up by the paidagong and gathers healthy qi to tonify and replenish the kidneys.

In Chinese medicine, the kidneys are known to affect health and life in general broadly, with a much more complex array of interrelationships than is understood by Western medicine. To name a few, this includes childhood growth and development, sexual/reproductive health and vitality—the testes are in fact commonly called “the external kidneys”—bone density, tooth health (as an extension of bone health), head hair, longevity/healthy aging, auditory acuity, and memory and concentration, as well as their Western roles in fluid metabolism and the excretion of waste. Maintaining kidney health is one of the primary keys to a long and healthy life.

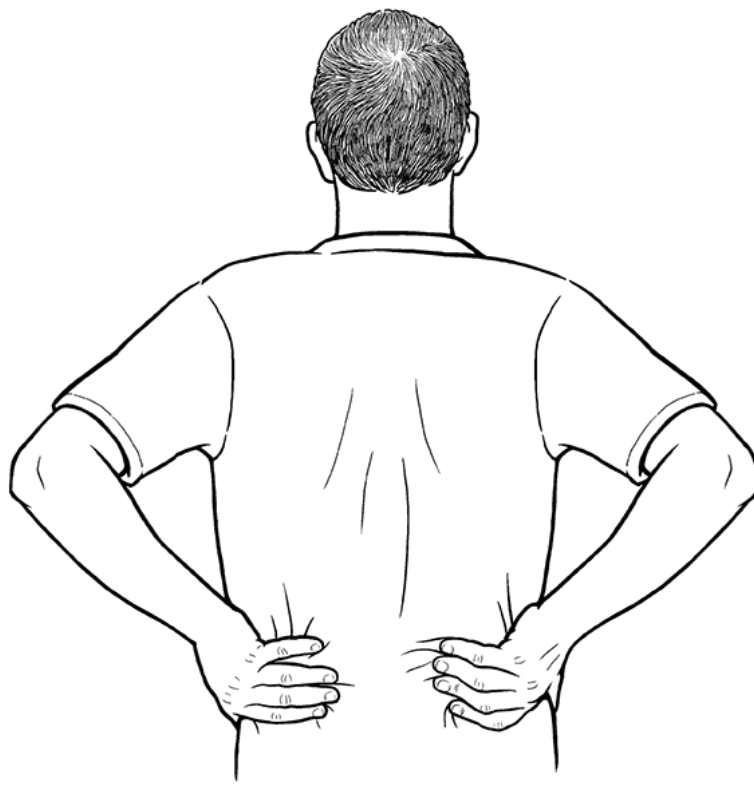


Figure 9.6 (Kidney Massage)

The Kidney Massage can be done in one of two ways. If possible, it's best to use the palms of your hands directly on your kidneys. Done this way, first rub your hands together for a minute or two to warm them, bringing more qi and blood there. Next, place your hands on your low back, your right hand over your right kidney, and your left hand over your left kidney (**Fig 9.6** on previous page). Massage in small circles for a minute or two in one direction, and then reverse direction for the same amount of time. Do your best to engage the muscles below the skin, so that the muscles move and you're not just sliding your hands over your skin. Feel for the warmth of your hands penetrating all the way into your kidneys. There is no maximum time limit for this practice, so you can continue it beyond a few minutes if you'd like.

Some people have very tight shoulders and are unable to place their palms directly on their low back. In that case, this method is a good alternative option that should be possible for almost anyone. Make soft fists with your thumbs curled around your fingers. Place the sides of your fists at your low back, so that the web region between thumb and index fingers are touching your back above each kidney. You can make circles in the manner described above, or you can simply move your fists up and down. Again, try to use enough pressure so that you move the back muscles under the skin, and not just the skin itself. With practice over time, you may feel the kidneys move with the movement of your hands.

7. For Men Only—Prostate Massage

There are many Daoist and other Chinese practices designed to enhance sexual performance. This practice is not one of those, but rather is specifically to promote a

man's general and sexual health. Good health is the necessary foundation for better performance in any activity, though, so you may notice some improvements in your sexual performance as your prostate become healthier.

The prostate is a walnut-sized gland located between the bladder and the penis, just in front of the rectum. The urethra runs through the center of the prostate, from the bladder to the penis, letting urine flow out of the body. Along with the adjacent seminal vesicles, the prostate secretes a slightly alkaline fluid that nourishes and protects sperm. During ejaculation, it squeezes this fluid into the urethra, and it's expelled with sperm as semen. The alkalinity of semen helps neutralize the acidity of the vaginal tract, prolonging the sperm's lifespan.

While some men may be embarrassed by or psychologically uncomfortable with this exercise, the Prostate Massage is very important for men's sexual and general health. Regardless of the amount of sexual activity one has, the prostate gland frequently becomes enlarged as men age, congesting with blood, prostatic fluid and other body fluids. This sets the stage for BPH, benign prostatic hyperplasia/hypertrophy, a non-cancerous enlargement of the prostate gland, which can cause discomfort, burning urination, reduced and/or urgent urinary flow, frequent nighttime urination, and an increased possibility of urinary tract infections, among other things. Although there is no definitive Western medical link between BPH and prostate cancer, from a Chinese medical perspective, the factors that cause BPH and the secondary obstruction of the enlarged prostate itself can set the stage for prostate cancer. Prostate massage can prevent or reverse some of those underlying factors, and promote prostate health in any case.

The mechanics of the Prostate Massage will be familiar to most men, since it is nearly identical to the DRE (digital rectal exam) their physician gives to examine the prostate in a typical prostate exam. The main differences are in body position, since this is something you will be doing to yourself and your position needs to accommodate that, and the amount of force used on the prostate itself. Many doctors jab or poke at the prostate during a DRE, which can be very unpleasant and even painful. While most men may never actually enjoy a prostate massage, it does not have to be, and should not be, a physically uncomfortable experience.

Before you begin you may want to get latex gloves, which are easy to find at any drugstore, and a lubricant. You can use a water-soluble lubricant like K-Y Jelly, or any natural oil lubricant like olive oil. If your knees are weak or achy, or if you are generally not very flexible, you should do this sitting on a toilet seat. If you are flexible and can squat with no problem, doing this squatting will make it a little easier to insert your finger and access your prostate.



Figure 9.7 (For Men Only—Prostate Massage)

Put the latex glove on whichever hand you prefer. Apply some lubricant to your middle finger. Your middle finger is longest, and should have no difficulty reaching your prostate. Once you have some experience with this, you can use your index finger if you prefer. Then, either sit on the toilet seat or squat. Reach between your legs, behind your scrotum, and slowly and carefully insert your lubricated finger into your rectum, as far as you can (**Fig 9.7**). The pad of your inserted finger will be facing the front of your body. Press forward and slightly upward, toward the base of your penis. Feel for a walnut-sized protrusion or bump just inside the muscle wall. That's your prostate gland. If you've ever had a prostate exam, this should feel familiar. A healthy prostate is firm yet springy, without being hard, similar to a flexed biceps muscle. It should not hurt to press into it. Apply firm steady pressure, that is, don't jab or poke, and press into every part of the surface of the prostate you can feel. As you press into your prostate, it's common to express some prostatic fluid from your penis. As in massage done anywhere on the body, this brings more healthy blood and nutrients into the prostate and surrounding muscle, helps to remove toxic accumulation within the prostatic tissue, and expresses prostatic fluid.

In healthy men under forty years old, doing this once or twice a month is sufficient. In older men once a week is recommended, and in those with painful, difficult, or frequent urination, (in the absence of any diagnosed condition requiring medical attention), twice a week or more, at whatever frequency best reduces the uncomfortable symptoms, may be necessary. Once the symptoms abate, the frequency may be reduced.

8. For Women Only—Breast Massage

In Daoist and other Chinese practices, there are many variations to the Breast Massage, which can be practiced for different purposes. This version is specifically to promote a woman's general and sexual health.

Women are hormonally more complex than men, with a correspondingly greater degree of hormonal interrelationships. The mammary glands and the associated ducts within the breasts themselves are responsible for the production and transportation of breast milk during lactation. The breasts also respond to the sex hormones estrogen and progesterone produced in the ovaries, accounting for changes in breast size and sensitivity, among other things, that many women experience throughout the menstrual cycle. Oxytocin, a hormone produced in the hypothalamus of the brain, usually from nipple stimulation (as relates to the breasts), is primarily responsible for sexual arousal (bringing on or inducing labor, signaling the beginning and continuation of lactation) and for states of mental and emotional well-being and stress relief. It is further associated with learning and memory.

From the Chinese perspective, all hormones are a type of Jing essence, substances that nourish and rejuvenate the body, and sexual essences are particularly potent toward those ends. Additionally, a number of acupuncture meridians directly run through the breasts, providing specific energetic connections and associations. Many of those meridians begin at the feet and end within the head, indicating the whole body connection and their influence on mental and emotional states. The Kidney meridian runs directly through the genitals and has many associations with sexual health and function. In the region of the breasts, it is medial, that is, nearer to the breastbone.

The Liver meridian circles the genitals and runs almost through the center of the breast, although the last needled point on the Liver meridian is just below the breast. Most menstrual and many other gynecological disorders are treated primarily through the Liver. The external, needled portion of the pericardium, or heart protector, meridian begins just beyond the outer side of the nipple. Through the pericardium's association with the heart, it's easy to understand its connection to love and other bonding emotions. The Spleen meridian lies just outside the nipple, beyond the Pericardium meridian, and the Stomach meridian runs directly through the nipple and centerline of breast. The Spleen and Stomach are a Yin-Yang organ pair, with related functions. The Spleen in particular plays a role in generating blood, so the menstrual connection is easy to understand, and it can readily be influenced by the Liver (especially noticeable when emotional upsets throw off appetite and digestion).

In this practice, you can wear a light shirt or none at all. You could possibly wear a light sports bra with no underwire, but otherwise a bra will be too restrictive and dull sensation, so it's not advisable. If you're able, sit on the floor with either heel placed at the opening of your vagina, lightly touching your clitoris, and your other leg either

extended or bent in front of you. If you can't get into that position, sit on a chair with a tennis ball, rolled sock, or something else that is comparably firm yet not too hard placed at the opening of your vagina. The gentle contact stimulates the acupuncture meridians in that region, and may additionally stimulate a hormone response that will enhance the benefits of this exercise. Rub your hands together until they are comfortably warm, indicating that you've brought qi and blood to your hands. Place your hands on your breasts, and feel the warmth from your hands penetrating your breast tissue.

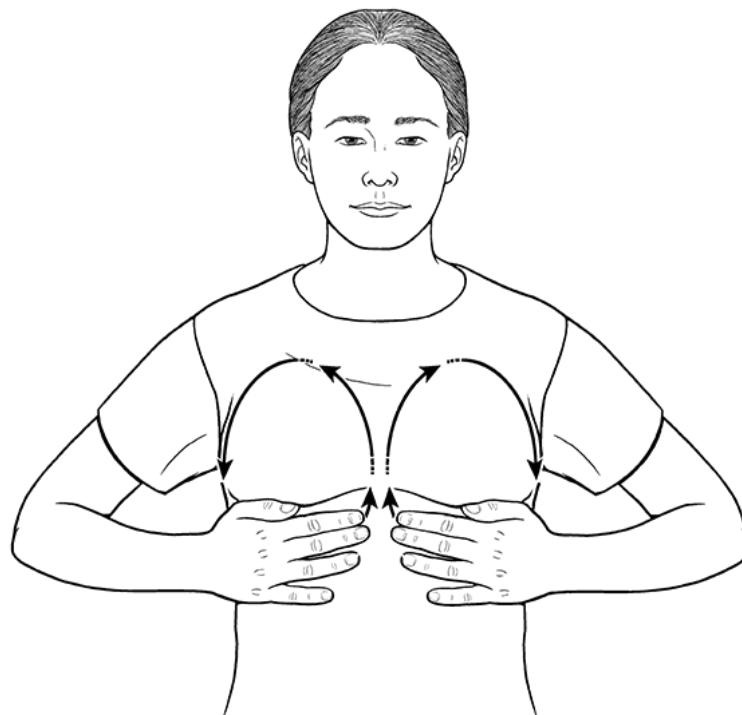


Figure 9.8A (For Women Only—Breast Massage)

For most women, and for most health purposes, you will want to circle your hands upward along your breastbone (**Fig 9.8A**), outward over the tops of your breasts, down the outside of your breasts (**Fig 9.8B** on next page), and inward toward your breastbone below your breasts. Circle thirty-six times. This stimulates qi flow through all the related acupuncture meridians discussed above, and is a dispersal technique, which scatters any stuck qi that may be gathered around your breast.

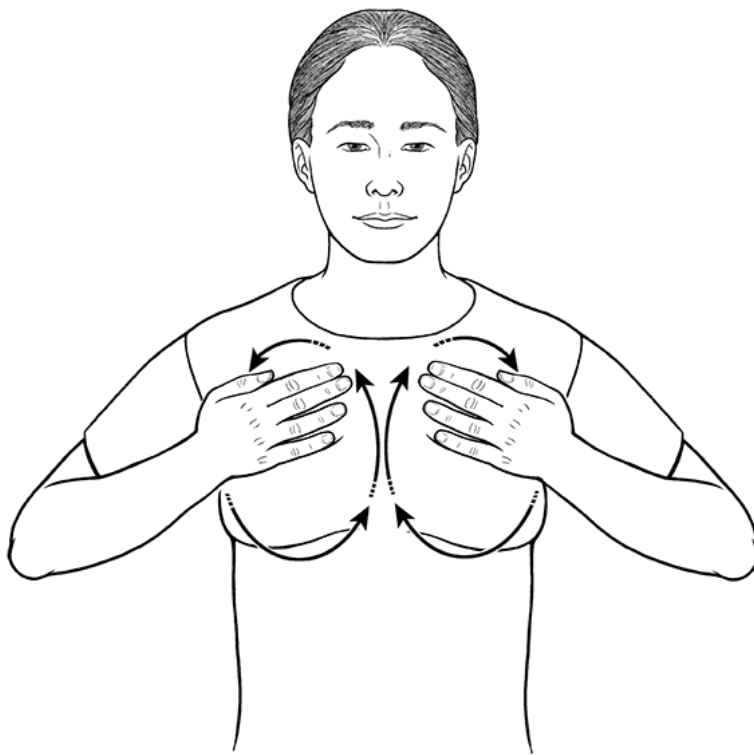


Figure 9.8B (For Women Only—Breast Massage)

Dispersing stagnation in the breasts is important, since almost all physical changes are preceded by energetic ones, which is why paidagong is beneficial as discussed elsewhere throughout this book. Some physical changes are relatively benign, such as when breasts become enlarged and tender premenstrually. This Dispersal technique can relieve that tenderness. While most effective if performed daily, it should be begun at least a few days before the expected onset of monthly breast tenderness. In this case, one hundred circles, performed up to twice daily, is recommended. If a woman is nursing, even if her breasts are tender, Dispersing is not recommended as it may reduce lactation. Once she has stopped nursing, this practice may be resumed.

In other cases when qi gets stuck in the breasts, over time it can cause fibrocystic lumps, cysts, and even cancer. It is common for qi to stagnate in the breasts due to strong lingering emotions or physical trauma. In athletic women, even jogging has been known to cause problems, both from when a woman's arms repeatedly rub or bump the sides of the breasts, and from the bouncing of insufficiently supported breasts creating microtrauma within breast tissue.

For younger women who may have small breasts and want to try to enlarge them, and for women who have insufficient lactation while nursing, Gathering should be performed instead of Dispersal. Gathering is done exactly as Dispersal, except the direction of the circles is reversed. This will bring more qi to the breasts. Women with very small breasts may have a hormonal insufficiency or imbalance. (Breast size alone is not enough to make that determination and other factors must be considered by a health professional.) In that case, bringing more qi to the breasts will not be harmful in younger women, as the practice can remedy the imbalance. Since this is being done for a specific purpose as

opposed to for general health, this is another case where one hundred circles twice a day is recommended. After six months (nine months at the longest), if the breasts have not enlarged at least some, the practice will not be of help and Dispersal should be practiced for general health. Since an increase in local, nonmuscular tissue is the aim of this practice, nine months is not an unreasonably long amount of time in which to expect results. Once the breasts have reached their desired size, the Gathering practice should be reduced to thirty-six circles once a day, and interspersed with Dispersal a few times a week to prevent potential qi stagnation. For insufficient lactation, one hundred circles twice a day is also recommended. Once nursing has stopped, Dispersal should be resumed for general health purposes.

[contents]

Ten

Abdominal/Internal Organ Massage

Abdominal massage is a very large topic, and entire books have been devoted to it. At professional levels, it can take many weeks of training to get acquainted with just the basics, and months or years to master. In part, it's because the abdomen contains all major internal organs (except the heart and lungs): liver, gall bladder, stomach, spleen, pancreas, kidneys, urinary bladder, and large and small intestines. Thus, so much of the body's overall health and functionality are affected. It contains the lumbar and lower thoracic regions of the spine and the related nerves that enter and exit the spine at those levels. While it may be difficult to believe, the front of that part of the spine can be accessed in some deep massage practices. The abdomen is also an access region for a major nerve plexus (the solar plexus), located just below the breastbone, as well as for lymphatic vessels and tissues and blood vessels, including the aorta, one of the major arteries exiting the heart.

In Chinese energetics, the abdomen contains the lower Dantian, the energy center that influences everything to do with physicality. In Japanese energetics it is the seat of the hara (translated as "center"), similar to the Dantian in location and function but with slightly broader medical applications, commonly used diagnostically in Japanese acupuncture and acupressure. Depending on the type and purpose of abdominal massage, most or all of these things need to be taken into account.

Here are a couple of practices that are safe for anyone, easy to learn, and effective for what they are designed to do. While you don't need to know much anatomy, a little familiarity is helpful and will be provided.

The first practice is the more physical of the two, and has a few variations. The primary method presented is best suited for people with healthy to underactive digestive and eliminative functions (having less than one to up to three normal bowel movements a day). It improves digestion and elimination, tones the gastrointestinal system, brings more blood into all the abdominal organs, disperses areas of congested blood, body fluids, and other toxic accumulations, improves breathing, and with some practice assists in improving organ mobility (the springiness of the organs and the suspensory ligaments to which they are attached) and organ motility (the natural rhythms and pulsations

generated by and within each organ, indicating its vitality and healthy functionality).

1. The Physical Practice

Lie on your back on a mat, on a thick rug on the floor, or on a firm mattress. You can keep your legs extended normally, or bend your knees and place your feet flat on the floor. Many people prefer the bent-knee position because it naturally releases tension in the abdominal muscles, allowing for a more comfortably deep massage.

Next, decide if one massaging hand alone or both together will work best for you. If your fingers are strong and free of pain, you can use one hand in this practice. In that case, either compress your fingers together side by side for support, or wrap the tips of your four fingers around the tip of your thumb so that the tips of all fingers are touching the thumb, with no one fingertip protruding farther than the others (**Fig 10.1**). This is a hand position used in the Chinese massage practice of tuina, and it is also the beak or whip hand used in the taiji posture Single Whip. If your fingers are not very strong, or if you have joint pain in your fingers or want a deeper massage, you can use two hands in this way. Place the backs of the fingers of each hand together, again with no finger protruding farther than any of the others, so that you have two rows of four fingers at roughly the same height (**Fig 10.2**).



Figure 10.1 (The Physical Practice)

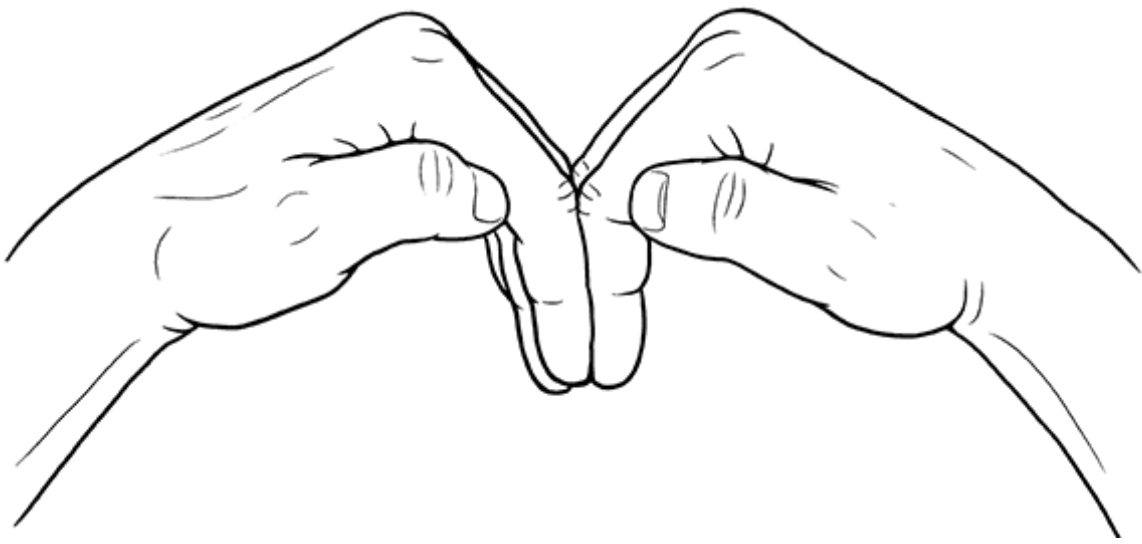


Figure 10.2 (The Physical Practice)

Now, using one or both hands, place the tips of your fingers just below your belly button (**Fig 10.3**). Press straight down toward the floor, to whatever depth feels comfortable to you. Make small clockwise circles. Do not let your fingers slide over the surface of your skin, but direct the force downward so that the muscles and internal organs just below your fingertips move in that small clockwise circle. Do this for just a few seconds. Next, partially release the pressure, and slide your fingertips clockwise, a bit to the right and slightly upward, reapply full pressure, and make the small clockwise circles. As you continue this pattern (straight pressure downward, small clockwise circles, release some of the pressure, move your hand to the next location clockwise, reapply full pressure, etc.), your hand(s) will circle your entire belly button in a clockwise circle. The internal organ primarily affected in this circle is the small intestine.

When you arrive at your starting point, closing the large clockwise circle, move your hand slightly lower below your belly button, and repeat all of the above, making a larger clockwise circle around your belly. The small intestine is still influenced in this circle. Consider your starting position below your belly button as 6 o'clock. From the 8 o'clock to 4 o'clock positions, you're also influencing the large intestine. Depending on the size of this circle, women may find their ovaries at the 7–8 o'clock and 4–5 o'clock positions. While light massage is beneficial to the ovaries, avoid deep massage with strong pressure on them. Between the 7 and 5 o'clock positions, the upper border of the uterus can be felt. Massaging the uterus is always beneficial, and is often very effective in relieving menstrual cramps. At roughly the 3 and 9 o'clock positions—at the sides of your belly slightly above the height of your navel—your fingers will be over the front of your kidneys. They are closer to the back of your body, but for people who are very thin, or for people who are able to comfortably use deep pressure, you may feel a firmness or hardness at that location, about the size of your fist. Those are your kidneys. Light to moderate pressure on them is okay, as long as that pressure does not produce pain. The kidneys are fairly delicate organs, and you should never use strong pressure on them. If you don't

feel your kidneys, that's fine too. The wave motion you send through your body by the circling massage will still reach them and be beneficial.



Figure 10.3 (The Physical Practice)

When you arrive at your starting point again, repeat all of the above once more, making the largest circle around your belly. Begin just above the center of your pubic bone. The urinary bladder is located there, so you may be more comfortable if you void your bladder before beginning this massage. Women will find the main body of the uterus here as well. In this circle, you will be accessing the large intestine along the sides of your belly and below your ribs. This time, make sure your fingertips contact your ribs during the upper half of the large circle, and direct some of the fingertip pressure under your ribs. That will directly massage your liver and gall bladder (just below your ribs on the right side of your abdomen), and your stomach, which is below your ribs near the middle on the left of your abdomen. To some extent it will indirectly (for most nonprofessional self-massagers) influence your spleen and pancreas, also on the left. Your pancreas is just behind your stomach and to the left, and your spleen is farther to the left and slightly lower.

To benefit your diaphragm, which is also a muscle that responds to massage like other muscles, try to hook your fingers under your ribs so you can massage the inner surface of the ribs. This is near where the diaphragm attaches to the front of your body, and massaging here will relax your diaphragm, allowing for fuller, deeper breathing. For most

people, it will be easiest to do this at your lowest ribs near the sides of your belly, and will get more difficult and sensitive as you approach your midline below your breastbone, where more muscle attachments and the solar plexus create more tension. With practice, you will be able to open that middle region more. Don't force it; be gentle but diligent. When you arrive at the center of your pubic bone once more, that ends the general abdominal massage.

The first variation is for people who typically have more than three bowel movements a day, or chronic loose bowels or diarrhea. Frequently these people also have low energy or fatigue, have a poor appetite, and may feel chilled easily. This variation is performed exactly like the general massage, except that the direction of both the small fingertip circles and three larger circles are done in a counterclockwise direction. Some get better results starting with the large circle, fingertips just above the pubic bone, the second two circles getting gradually smaller, ending with fingertips just below the navel. In addition to reducing the activity of the intestines, that way brings more qi to the center, the Dantian, helps to build energy. Experiment to see what works best for you. In either case, over time you should see an improvement in bowel function, especially when including other exercises from this book in your daily practice.

The next variation is for people who experience some discomfort, including mild to moderate pain when doing the abdominal massage. This is not uncommon, and usually is no cause for concern. You may encounter areas of pain, tenderness, or hardness. That discomfort can be caused by a variety of factors, including simple qi stagnation, gas, bowel obstruction or fecal impaction, tension in the diaphragm, or muscle tenderness from exercise, injury, or a deep spasmed muscle. Many people feel physically, emotionally, or psychologically vulnerable around the abdomen, and they may guard or armor that part of the body unconsciously. When that guard is penetrated, even by oneself, it can be uncomfortable or painful. There is a possibility of pain indicating something more serious, like an inflamed appendix, an aortic aneurysm, diverticulosis, gall or kidney stones, or other internal organ disease, but usually those more serious conditions will present with significant pain and other symptoms. They need to be treated by your physician. If you're at all in doubt, seek professional medical advice. The massage as described here will not cause any serious problems, but will only shine a light on a problem that already exists. Otherwise, in the absence of serious pain, in this variation work on those uncomfortable areas a little longer than the other more comfortable areas. Being careful not to apply so much pressure that you increase any pain or discomfort you feel, massaging longer will gradually disperse that discomfort, indicating that the underlying condition causing the discomfort is being resolved. This may not happen all at once. Keep track of the location of the discomfort, and over a number of days or weeks, see if it lessens or changes location. Either can indicate an improvement in the underlying

condition. If your belly is very relaxed, remember that it's possible to contact the front of your spine along the midline of your belly, and the hardness you may encounter in that case is normal.

2. The Energetic Practice

The second practice uses very light touch and is primarily energetic in nature. As in the abdominal massage, there are a couple of variations you can try. In all methods, begin by rubbing your hands together until the palms are warm. This brings blood to your palms, and blood carries qi. The Chinese medical phrase "blood is the mother of qi" means that qi grows out of and is carried by blood. In these energetic practices, you want to have as much qi in your hands as possible to get the best results.

The basic practice follows the same general pattern as the abdominal massage above. That is, you are going to make a large clockwise circle around your abdomen. After you've warmed your hands by rubbing them together, place your right palm on the right side of your belly, and your left palm on the left side. Feel for the warmth penetrating your skin, and see if you can follow that warmth more deeply inside your body. Use your mind as much as your physical sensitivity to accomplish this. Then, keeping that sense of deep penetration under your hands as best you can, circle both hands in a clockwise circle around your belly. Only one hand will be able to remain in contact for the entire circle, and it doesn't matter whether you choose the left or right, but for this description we'll select the right hand. In a clockwise circle, your right hand will move up and then to the left under your ribs as your left hand moves down and to the right. When your right hand nearly reaches the 9 o'clock position, your left hand will nearly reach the 3 o'clock position. At that point, lift your left hand and let it lightly brush over your right wrist as you continue the circle, keeping your right hand in contact with your belly at all times. As soon as your left hand crosses your right wrist, let it once again contact your belly. When you get good at this practice, the energetic connection from your left hand to your belly will not break, even though the physical connection does. To help maintain good digestion and elimination, do a minimum of twelve circles per day. There is no set upper limit of repetitions for this practice, so if you enjoy it feel free to do as many as you'd like. As your hands pass over all the organs discussed in the abdominal massage practice, this benefits all of those organs energetically.

There are a few ways to practice the next variation, but they all have in common a downward focus on the centerline of your body, so you will only need to learn one method to accomplish that. Stomach qi naturally wants to descend. It does its job of breaking down proteins and turning everything you eat into a soupy liquid, and then sends that down into the small intestine for further digestion. Sometimes, though, a person may overeat, eat something that disagrees with them, drink too much alcohol, get emotionally upset, or become ill, and then the stomach qi moves upward, in the wrong

direction. The Chinese call this rebellious qi. Common symptoms include belching, acid reflux, nausea, and in extreme cases, vomiting. This is a practice to restore the normal flow of stomach qi and alleviate those distressing symptoms.

As in the basic practice, warm your hands and place them on the sides of your belly. Using your mind, feel the warmth penetrate your body deeply. This time you will not make clockwise circles. Instead, move both hands upward along the side of your belly, and circle to the midline only, one hand on your breastbone, and one just below it on your solar plexus. It does not matter which hand is in either position. Then slide your hands down the midline of your belly, one hand staying above the other. Use your mind even more to encourage the downward flow of qi while moving your hands downward. Move both hands to just below your navel and part them, right hand moving right and left hand moving left. Again circle up the sides of your belly, minimizing the energetic connection during the upward movement, until your hands once again reach your breastbone and solar plexus. Repeat as many times as is necessary for you to feel some relief and restore the sense of normal descending stomach qi.

[contents]

Eleven

Whole Body

1. Beginning A Practice Session: Whole Body Vibration

Vibration practices are related to paidagong, working in a similar way and with a similar rationale. They are used to break down small or large regions of energetic obstruction, that is, qi stagnation, where qi has become condensed and unusable by the body, and which frequently becomes pathogenic, the root cause of most pain and many diseases. This is accomplished by introducing a different waveform, another frequency of energy from the vibration (or the tap of paidagong) created by a physical movement and guided by the mind into the regions of condensed qi.

In pockets of qi stagnation, energy and fluids no longer move or are restricted and move minimally. Some of the more obvious causative factors include trauma and illness. Even when the trauma heals and the illness resolves, there may be lingering smaller areas where stagnation remains, largely unnoticed. A few other less obvious factors include prolonged inactivity, including sedentary work that is not balanced with adequate exercise; certain emotional states, especially if prolonged; worry and obsessive thinking; certain environmental factors, primarily cold and damp; improper diet; and the side effects of some prescription and recreational drugs. All of these can cause qi to constrict and stagnate, quietly accumulating, contributing to assorted imbalances, until a "critical mass" of sorts is reached, which is when physical symptoms manifest, and then a more rapid degeneration may begin.

Stagnant qi becomes dead, incapable of nourishing life, gradually leaching the life and vitality from surrounding healthy tissue. Conventional exercise, while beneficial in many ways, is often not enough to reverse this process. Exercise will make a person feel better for a time because it causes more qi and blood to move through the healthy parts of the body, but it is not designed to access and dissolve the unhealthy accumulations. If it did, professional athletes would be among the most long-lived members of our culture, but in fact their life span, on average, is shorter than that of the general population. Most professional sports involve impact, the very type of trauma or microtrauma that creates qi stagnation. The incapacitating and sometimes lethal martial art dim mak makes use of

this phenomenon.

The whole body vibration you will learn here works well and is very easy to do. It can be practiced by itself at any time of the day, for brief periods of time or as long as you'd like. One of my teachers, a lineage holder from Emei mountain, told me that the Daoist monks from Emei say, "One thousand vibrations a day cures one hundred diseases." At about three vibrations a second, you can easily do one thousand vibrations in about six minutes. You can do it while watching TV or listening to music. You can also do this at the beginning of the other self-care exercises. The vibrations shake things loose and free things up, and you can use self-care exercises to reorganize that loose energy in specific healthful ways.

Scientific Rationale for Vibration Practices

Whole body vibration benefits the entire body musculature, internal organs, and glands. The rapid firing of muscle spindle cells from whole body vibration causes a neuromuscular response provoking physiological changes within the brain and throughout the body. It is believed that the vibrations may additionally de-imprint the cellular memory of trauma and injury and reimprint positive, healthy information.

The health benefits of vibration acknowledged by Western medical science are varied. In animals, mechanically induced vibration produces a significant reduction in body fat along with increased new bone growth. In humans, bone density is increased, slowing or reversing osteoporosis. Elderly populations experience an improvement in (nonspecific) physical function, equilibrium, vitality, the quality of walking, a reduction in pain, and an improvement in general health. These results are typically achieved using vibration for just four one-minute sessions three times a week for six weeks in total.

Among the general population, some other areas of benefit include athletic and other physical performance, due to whole body vibration's ability to produce a positive influence on skeletal muscle, applied force, fatigue, oxygen uptake, and balance; a healthful normalization of hormone production and other aspects of metabolic activity; blood circulation; and pain management.

Because animals can't be trained to practice vibration themselves, and because Western science is more technologically oriented, a vibrating plate was used to mechanically induce vibration to achieve these observable benefits. That also allowed for the vibrations to be standardized and repeatable regarding vibration frequency and intensity, and duration of application. Scientists with differing research agendas and different affiliations around the country and world each had their preferred range of applied frequencies and intensities, and each purported to give the best results. Accordingly, such plates are now commercially available, many producing different frequencies and intensities than their counterparts from other companies, ranging in price between \$500 and \$10,000! Daoists have been using vibration for thousands of years

with no mechanical assistance, and with excellent and comparable results. Appreciate the science, but save your money. And of course, do the following practice.

Method

Stand with your feet parallel, shoulder or hip width apart, arms hanging loosely at your sides. Make sure your knees are slightly bent, not locked. This is your starting position. Now, drop your weight almost as though you were getting ready to spring off a diving board or bounce on a trampoline, lowering your butt just a couple of inches at most. It's okay if your knees move forward some, but it should be fairly minimal, not like you're doing knee bends. Feel for your body's natural springiness, and allow that to bounce you back up to your starting position. It may take a few times for you to feel that springy bounce-back. Once you have it, however, it becomes very easy, and you simply bounce while standing in place. No part of your feet should leave the ground. Establish a comfortable rhythm. If you want to do three vibrations a second, you can count like you might have done as a child to gauge the passage of seconds, "1-Missis-sippi, 2-Missis-sippi, 3-Missis-sippi," and so on, bouncing with each grouping of syllables. On days when this might be your only practice, go for 1,000 vibrations (bounces), or about six minutes of bouncing. If three bounces a second is too fast for you, adjust accordingly and bounce for a correspondingly longer time.

While you bounce, strive to allow every part of your body to be loose and relaxed. Your arms may swing a little, your torso may sway a bit, and your head may bob forward and back or side to side. All of this should only happen naturally from the bounce; do not try to make it happen. Your shoulders should bounce only from the upward wave generated by the springiness in your body. If you can keep your jaw relaxed, your teeth will chatter with each bounce. You should not force or induce any part of your body to move, aside from how the bounce makes your body move. Any force or intentional movement will generate some amount of muscle tension. If you hold your arms in any position besides keeping them loose at your sides, you use muscles to make that happen. Here, you want to release muscle tension throughout your entire body.

Use your mind to take inventory of your body as you bounce, and see what body parts or regions are not moving, or not moving well. You may notice tension in your low back or your eyes. As you become more sensitive, you may notice that your liver or your kidneys are not moving. You can use your mind to guide the energy of the wave through those regions, to loosen them and allow them to vibrate with the bounce. Ultimately, that's how you want to do it, but if you initially find it difficult to do that with your mind alone, you can try a few other physical things to help. Make the intensity of the vibration stronger. That is, lower yourself just a little more so your bounce back becomes more powerful, creating a stronger vibrational wave through your entire body. See if you are favoring one leg over the other, and first try to make sure your legs are bouncing equally. Conversely,

it's possible you may need to favor one side more than the other. If you notice that your liver isn't moving well, for example, you may need to drop more weight down your right leg so the corresponding energetic wave rises more strongly on your right side.

There are many possible variations to this practice. A teacher might instruct you to hold your arms in a particular position to achieve a specific result—there are reasons to purposely block energy flow to a body part, or to shunt more energy to a body part. You might be instructed to chant specific syllables to create another level of vibration using sound to target a particular organ sensitive to that vibration. For general purposes and overall good health, the above practice covers a lot of territory and is the best option.

2. Waking the Qi: Dragon Playing with a Pearl

This is the only exercise in this book to specifically sensitize you to feeling qi. As such, it can serve as a simple entry point to true qigong practices, and can be used to enhance the benefits of the other exercises as you become more adept with it. "Holding a qi ball" is frequently taught to Chinese children as a game, inspiring one of its more fanciful names, Dragon Playing with a Pearl.

At first glance, this may seem like an exercise for the hands and arms, but awakening the qi influences the whole body, moving qi from head to toe and even outside of your physical body. It does not add to the total qi your body has, but you may feel energized from this practice; it can free up qi that has been bound up, previously unusable by you. This can also engender a feeling of peace and tranquility, and can minimize or eliminate pain, especially if caused by qi stagnation or obstruction.

Your qi may be first felt most easily outside the body, usually between the hands. The most sensitive spot to feel qi is located in the center of each palm, and is called laogong, the eighth point on the Pericardium meridian used in acupuncture. Laogong translates as "labor palace," which according to Arnie Lade in his book *Images and Functions*, suggests "the point's possible role in physical, mental, and spiritual revitalization." Laogong is such a sensitive point that most people will feel some sensation there almost immediately once they've focused on it, a great way to allow even a skeptic the chance to feel the presence of qi.



Figure 11.1 (Walking the Qi: Dragon Playing with a Pearl)

Method

Stand with your feet parallel, shoulder to hip width apart. Your knees should have a slight bend in them, straight but not locked. Keep your spine straight but not rigid, with your chin tucked to straighten your neck, and the tip of your tongue touching the roof of your mouth, just behind your teeth. Keep your breath full, even, and regular throughout the practice. Rub your palms together until they are comfortably warm, and raise your arms to the height of your chest. The arms are rounded wide in front of the body, as though hugging a large tree, which helps to open all the meridian pathways within your arms and between your arms and chest. Move the palms close to each other, facing each other as though holding a tennis ball, or a slightly larger ball, between them (**Fig 11.1**). Your eyes should remain open and softly focused at a central point between the palms. This is because, although qi may first be easiest felt inside the body if the eyes are closed, here you are trying to feel qi being projected outside of the body between your hands. Wherever the visual attention is placed, the mind is inclined to follow. As the mind is made to focus between the hands, you will become increasingly aware of the initially subtle sensations that accompany the presence of the qi. The mind directs the qi.

Qi sensations are many and varied, can change from time to time in any one person, and may even be unique to a particular individual. Some of the most common descriptions include the sensation of magnetic attraction or repulsion, a feeling of gentle or rushing wind or water, a mildly electric buzz or tingle, or a shift in temperature (either warmer or cooler). Sometimes there may be a definable kinesthetic sensation as much as a mood shift, an emotional shift, or a feeling of being high, in a pleasantly altered state of consciousness. These latter presentations indicate that qi is moving somewhere inside the brain, accessing aspects of the mind. In fact any number of sensations are possible, and none are necessarily wrong. It's also common for a person to feel different sensations at different practice times. The differing sensations may be due to different levels of sensitivity and accomplishment, the state of health the body is in during the practice session, the quality or quantity of qi being emitted or sensed, the intention of the practitioner, the immediate environment (which influences qi), current emotional state, the way a particular individual is energetically "wired," or combinations of the above.

Once you are feeling something between your hands, whatever that may be, then you can begin playing with those sensations. Move your hands farther apart, as though the ball is growing larger. Only move your hands as far apart as you can while maintaining that sense of qi between them. If you lose that sense, bring your hands closer together until you regain it. Then move your hands as though you are rolling them over the surface of the large ball, so that your right hand may be on top of the ball with your left on the

bottom, and then slowly reverse those positions. You can move your hands any way you can think of, as long as you keep the laogong points facing each other and you maintain the sense of qi between them. Practice this as long as you'd like. When you are ready to finish, either bring your palms closer together slowly, until they physically touch, and then complete the Running the Meridians practice that follows, or place your hands on your Dantian to store qi there, as is described in Qi Storage at the Dantian, after the next exercise.

3. Ending a Practice Session: Running the Meridians

This is another practice that influences almost your entire body at once. It can be practiced alone at any time of day for a quick pick-me-up, or it can be practiced at the end of any series of self-care exercises you choose on any given day. Almost all of the self-care exercises open a small or a large part your body, freeing energy that may be stagnant or restricted in those parts. This exercise organizes the energy that has been freed, and directs it through your acupuncture meridians adding to the normal flow of healthy qi, in the proper direction, to increase energy and benefit overall health.

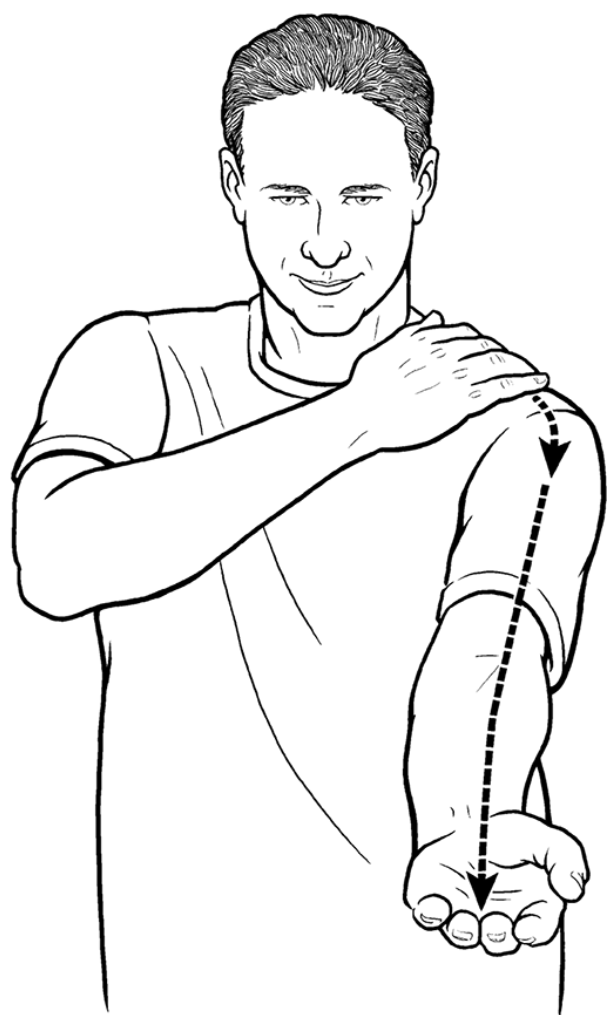
This exercise makes use of the Chinese anatomical position: when standing, raise your hands over your head, palms facing forward in what looks like a gesture of giving up or surrender. Within the acupuncture meridians, Yang qi runs down the back of your body from your head to your feet, including the backs of your hands and arms, and Yin qi runs up the front of your body from your feet to your head. With your body aligned in anatomical position, all the Yang meridians are facing the back of your body, and all the Yin meridians are facing the front of your body. Keep this image in mind when you perform this exercise, since your body will be in motion and you may not readily see that you are encouraging qi to flow in these healthy directions.

You'll work the upper half of your body, primarily your arms, separately from the lower half of your body, primarily your legs. It's most typical to begin this practice with your arms, as I'll describe here. This is most advantageous when running the meridians at the end of a taiji, qigong, or other self-care practice. When you finish with the legs, your hands naturally wind up at your lower Dantian, the perfect location to facilitate simple qi storage at the end of any set of self-care practice. If you run the meridians as a stand-alone practice at any time, and do not do qi storage afterward, it's fine to start with your legs and end with your arms if you prefer.

Method

Stand with your feet parallel, shoulder or hip width apart. Make sure your knees are not locked, and slightly bent. As with all exercises where you will use your hands to help direct qi anywhere in your body, it's a good idea to rub your palms together until they are warm. This brings both blood and qi to your hands. If you have previous qigong

experience and you know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you can bring your qi to your hands at will, you can skip that step. Extend your left arm straight in front of you, at approximately shoulder height, palm facing upward. Place your right hand, palm down, upon your left shoulder where your neck and shoulder meet (**Fig 11.2A** on next page). Rub or wipe your right hand down the entire length of your left arm, to just beyond your left fingertips. Then turn your left hand palm down, and rub or wipe your right hand up the back of the entire length of your left arm (**Fig 11.2B** on next page), from backs of the fingertips to where your neck and shoulder meet. At this point, remove your right hand, and extend your right arm directly in front of you at approximately shoulder height, palm facing upward. Do your best to make the movement of your right arm smooth and flowing, with a sense of purpose and connection rather than randomly moving it into position.



Figures 11.2A and 11.2B (Ending a Practice Session: Running the Meridians)

Now place your left hand, palm down, upon your right shoulder where your neck and shoulder meet. Rub your left hand down the entire length of your right arm, to just beyond your right fingertips. Then turn your right hand palm down, and rub your left hand up the back of the entire length of your right arm, from backs of the fingertips to where your neck and shoulder meet. At this point, remove your left hand, and extend your left arm directly in front of you at approximately shoulder height as before, palm facing

upward. Do your best to make the movement of your left arm smooth and flowing, with a sense of purpose and connection rather than randomly moving it into position. Repeat this procedure twelve times.

Even though your arms are extended in front of you and in motion, remember that in Chinese anatomical position, you are wiping your arms in the same direction as qi naturally flows within the meridians; that is, up the front or inner Yin surface of your arms, and down the back or outer Yang surface of your arms. As you get more familiar with this practice, you can perform it at either a slower or a faster pace. The smoothness of your movements and the regularity of the rhythm you establish is more important than the speed itself.

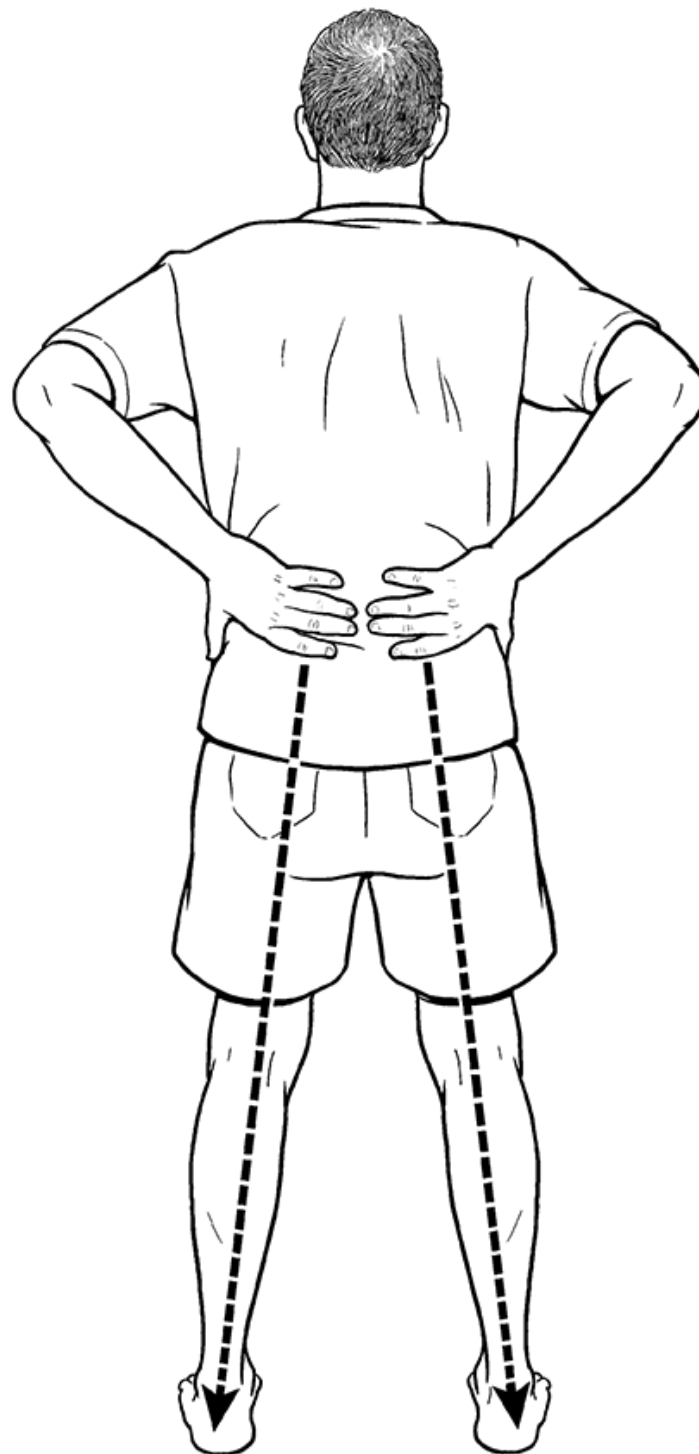


Figure 11.3A (Ending a Practice Session: Running the

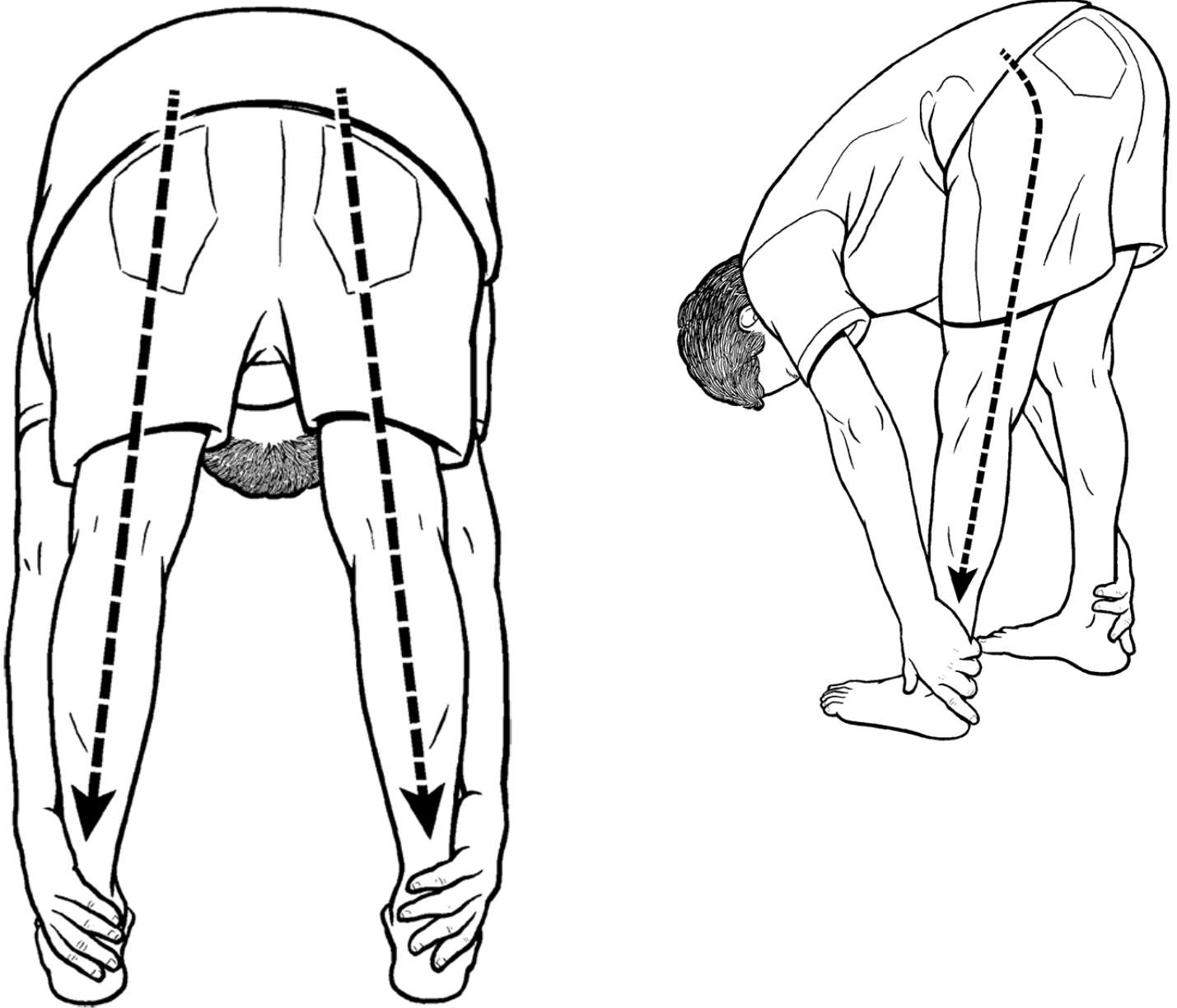


Figure 11.3B (Ending a Practice Session: Running the Meridians)

Place the palms of both of your hands on the small of your back, just above your buttocks, so that the tips of your middle fingers are nearly touching (**Fig 11.3A** on previous page). Bending forward, keep both hands in contact with your body and wipe down your buttocks and the backs of each leg, right hand wiping down the right leg and left hand wiping down the left leg. Wipe behind each knee, and all the way down to your heels. Make sure to spread your thumbs from the rest of your hands, and use them to wipe down the outer, lateral surface of your thighs and lower legs (**Fig 11.3B**).

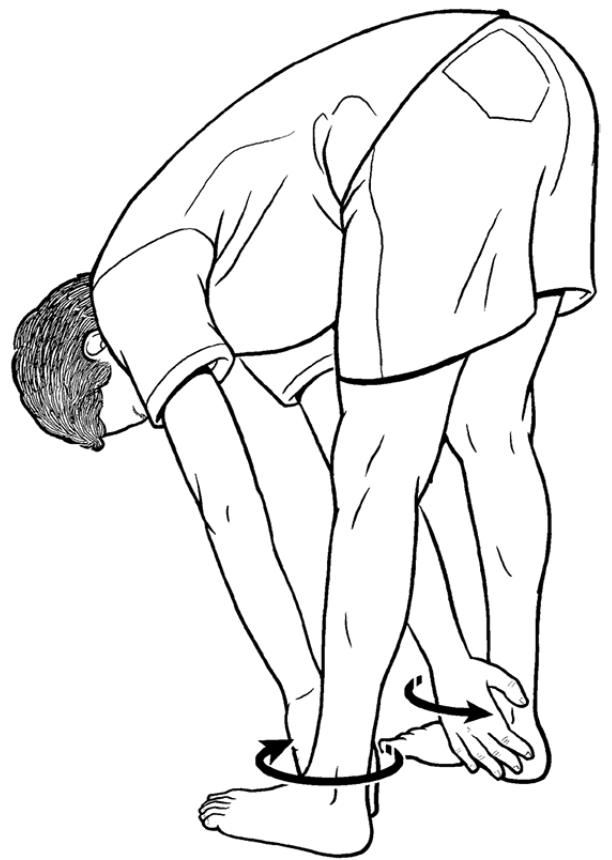
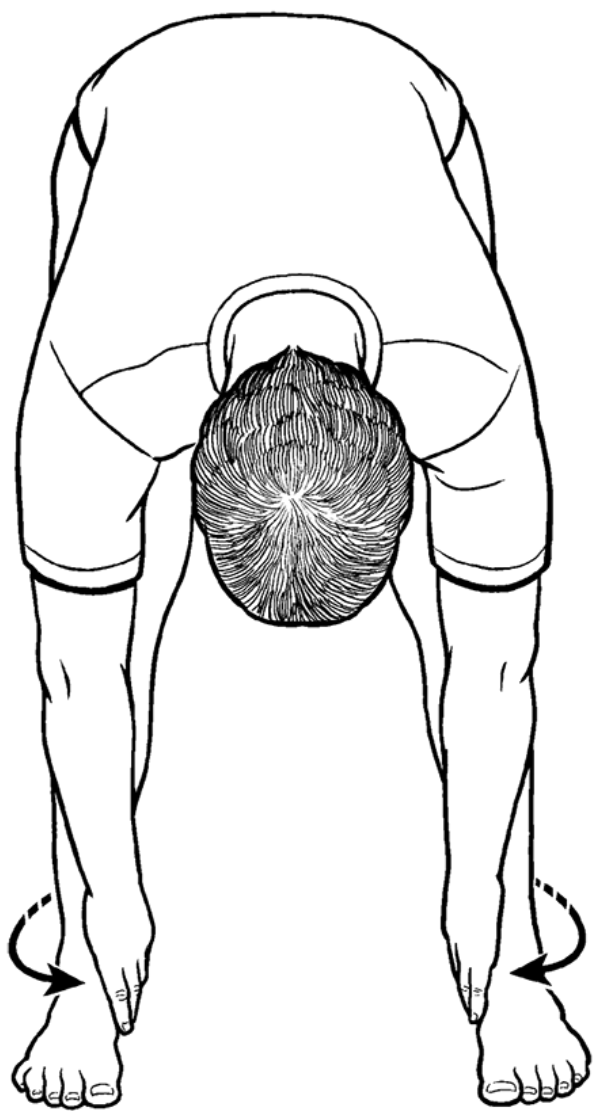


Figure 11.3C (Ending a Practice Session: Running the Meridians)

Keeping your hands in contact with your body, wipe around the outer ankles, over the tops of the front of the feet, and then to the inner ankles (**Fig 11.3C**). Rising up, wipe the inner surface of your lower legs and thighs. As your hands near your torso, spread them slightly so they move just outside of your genitals, and bring them to your low belly just above your pubic bone and below your navel (**Fig 11.3D** on next page). Still maintaining contact with your body, spread your hands away from each other, wiping around your waist until they arrive at their starting position at the small of your back, middle fingers nearly touching. Repeat this procedure twelve times.

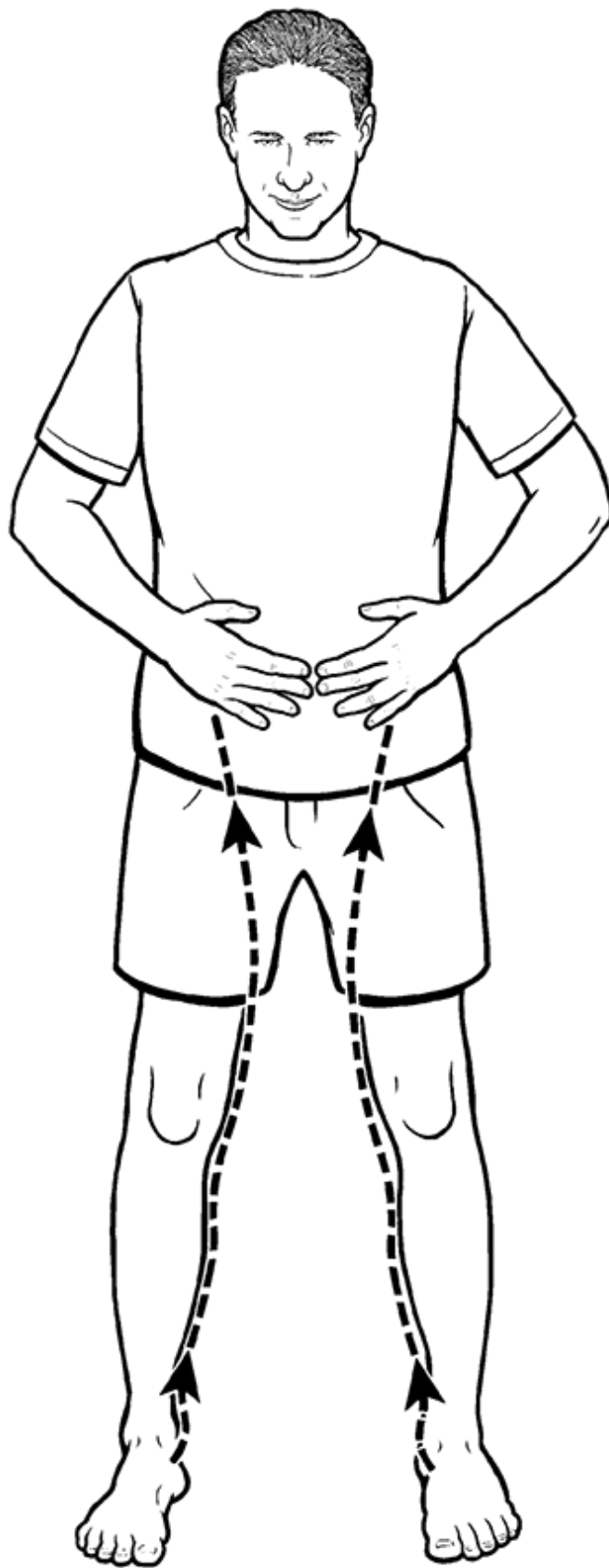


Figure 11.3D (Ending a Practice Session: Running the Meridians)

4. Qi Storage at the Dantian

The Dantian is one of the main energy centers in the body. Although there are three primary Dantians—upper, middle, and lower—when the word Dantian is used alone without any stipulation, it's almost always the lower Dantian being referred to. That's because the lower Dantian has the most to do with physical functions, health, and

vitality, so it has most to do with everyday life and with the interests of the majority of people involved in energy practices. It also serves as the main reservoir of the energy acquired through various qi practices, so learning to store qi at the Dantian is the main, if not only, way to have a net gain of energy at the end of the day.

If you practice taiji or qigong, you may have generated more qi or drawn healthy qi in from your environment. If you've practiced a self-care exercise set, you have freed up some previously unusable qi within your body. In either case, it's a good idea to store what is now a surplus of qi, so that it does not simply dissipate over the course of the day. There are many ways to store qi. This is one of the simplest, and is best done after Running the Meridians or Dragon Playing with a Pearl.

After the twelfth repetition of running the leg meridians, your hands naturally arrive at your lower belly, where your Dantian is located. This time, do not slide your hands around your waist to the small of your back, but leave them at your low belly, just below your navel. Men should place their left hand directly on their belly and cover it with their right hand (**Fig 11.4** on next page), while women should place their right hand directly on their belly and cover it with their left hand. This is because in men, the right hand is the more Yang hand, and in women the left hand is the more Yang hand. Yang is naturally protective and stays more to the surface relative to Yin, and Yin is nurturing and stays more interior relative to Yang. This hand placement simply follows the natural order of Yin and Yang.



Figure 11.4 (Qi Storage at the Dantian)

After running the meridians, your hands should still feel slightly warm. You can use that warmth as a tactile reference. With your hands placed just below your navel, allow the warmth to penetrate your low belly, all the way to your Dantian, two to three inches in from the surface of your body. For most people, it will be easiest to close the eyes to avoid any external distraction, and use the mind to feel for that warmth at the Dantian. If you don't feel the warmth, that's okay, because the warmth is not the qi itself; it's just a guide to help you feel it. Allow your mind to settle on that location as best you can. You may experience any of a variety of other sensations there: motion like wind or water, tingling, tickling, or a sense of light or expansiveness. Again, you may feel none of those things and that's okay too. If you do feel something there, simply keep your mind on it until it quiets and stops. Whether you feel anything specific or not, if you keep your mind on your Dantian, qi will be stored there. At some point you will feel a sense of peace, stillness, or completion, and then you've finished storing what qi you can for the day. It may take just a few seconds or a few minutes. When you feel you are through, lower your hands to your sides, open your eyes, and move on to whatever is next in your day.

5. Follow Your Breath Meditation

Every previous practice in this book has directly addressed some aspect of the physical body. Some of those have enlisted the mind toward that end. This meditation practice is included now specifically to benefit the mind. Since every physical process is under the direct regulation of the mind and the organ it is most obviously associated with, the brain, the entire body will benefit from meditation practice.

The brain is the central processing unit of the nervous system, relying on, controlling, and responsible for all the electrical activity in the body. When the brain and nervous system are overdriven, stress is the inevitable result, setting the stage for all the diseases caused by stress, and most of the chronic aches and pains anywhere in the body. When the brain is quieted, mediated by the mind, that electrical activity diminishes, tension discharges, stress drops away, and the stress-induced disease processes and pain can be halted and reversed. The mind also plays a role in emotional responses and experiences, and emotions influence and are influenced by neurotransmitters and other hormones. It is well known to Chinese medicine that lingering emotional states always affect health (usually adversely), and conversely, imbalances in the function of each organ and organ system create a unique emotional proclivity. A calm, balanced, quiet mind reduces and ultimately eliminates emotional upset. The external circumstances may not change, but your response to those circumstances can and will change. This is how the hormonal systems can benefit and not become overtaxed, and another way the nervous system is benefited.

There are many types of meditation. Most are intended to turn off the conventional

thinking processes, quiet the mind, and create an inner stillness that allows for a nonintellectual awareness, a sense of simply being, and the perception of a connection with everything in existence. The sense of just being, existing in the moment, removes any worry and anxiety stemming from concerns about the future and regrets of the past. The perception of connection with all things in existence gives a sense of belonging, acceptance, grounding, and certainty about one's place in the world.

There may be no other time in history when meditation practice has been more necessary than it is today. With so many people completely "plugged in" to modern technology—with cell phones, texting, instant messaging, constantly working or playing on a laptop or iPad, updating Facebook status, Tweeting, having both jobs and families that demand you are electronically if not physically accessible twenty-four hours a day, and streaming audio and video news and entertainment to a computer or TV much of the rest of the time—everyone is perpetually distracted outside of themselves, seldom given the opportunity to catch their breath and learn more about who they really are, away from all those distractions. Paradoxically, most people also consider these contemporary distractions to be "normal life," and the thought of being without them may seem both impossible and boring. In fact, the perception of boredom has always been one of the biggest obstacles people have faced when beginning a meditation practice, and even when beginning some of the slower-moving or stationary practices of qigong, taiji, and gongfu. If you are one of those people, this may interest you and help you overcome your reservations.

Even outside of the context of meditation, new scientific research has demonstrated that enforced boredom—being made to do a mindlessly repetitive task—and relaxed boredom—daydreaming—serve a creatively useful purpose. In his book *Boredom: A Lively History* (Yale Press), University of Calgary professor Peter Toohey, PhD, cites studies at the University of British Columbia which showed that in volunteer students given mindless, routine assignments while having their brains scanned using functional magnetic resonance imaging, there was a high amount of activity in the part of the brain associated with complex problem solving. This indicates that when your mind is free of external distractions, it can work on puzzles, problems, and more abstract concepts, helping you find solutions that might otherwise elude your conscious thought processes. This has long been acknowledged as one of the side benefits of meditation, and is a likely mechanism to explain some aspects of inspiration and creative thought.

This entry-level meditation is very simple, yet very effective. Some variation of this practice is used in almost every spiritual and secular meditation tradition throughout the world.

Method

Sit on a hard or firmly cushioned chair, nothing too soft, at a height that allows your

knees to be bent at about a 90-degree angle. As long as your back is not in pain and in need of support, sit on the forward third of the seat. Do not lean back on the chair back, and do not slouch. Sit erect and upright, but without strain or force. Even though you are seated, keep your feet parallel at about shoulder width apart with your knees aligned directly above your feet. You can place your hands on your knees, or fold them in your lap. If you are not already an experienced meditator, hands placed on your knees will extend your arms and help to keep your armpits open, allowing for a freer flow of qi between your arms and torso. Place the tip of your tongue at the roof of your mouth, just behind where your teeth meet your gums. This connects two major energy pathways in the body, the Du meridian running up your back, over your head and ending at the roof of your mouth, and the Ren meridian running up the centerline of the front of your body and ending at the tip of your tongue. This posture will keep your body most open, create energetic connections, and allow for qi to move freely with minimal physical obstructions while you meditate.

Next, pay attention to your breathing. Breathe in and out only through your nose, unless you have a nasal obstruction that makes that impossible. Your breath should be comfortably long, and will likely get longer as you practice over time. Your breath should also be silent and slow, not coarse, noisy, or rough. Most people have a natural stopping point at the end of their inhalation and exhalation, where they have a pause, a brief period of held breath. Try to keep your breath continuous, so there is no pause between inhalation and exhalation. That creates a sense of circularity in your breathing rhythm. Still sitting erect, keep your belly soft and relaxed. Do your best to keep your chest still and sunken, so that it does not rise or expand forward when you inhale, nor drop when you exhale. With your mind, feel the region between your lowest ribs and your pelvis. On your inhalation, direct your breath to that region, and let it expand in all directions, including toward your back, like a balloon filling with air. On your exhalation, allow everything in that region to retract toward the center of your body, as though air was being released from the balloon. Practice this for a few minutes, with your eyes open or closed; either is fine. Most people find that closed eyes help remove external distractions and facilitate sensitivity to inner processes. The better you are able to breathe in this way, the more tension will be released from your nervous system, and the more deeply you will relax when you meditate.

The final piece of this practice begins the actual meditation. It's called "following your breath" because that's exactly what you're going to do, in one of three ways. Each way gets slightly more challenging and takes you a little further, but all yield good results. In the first way, each time you inhale, silently say to yourself, "inhale," and each time you exhale, silently say to yourself, "exhale." Let that be the only thought in your mind. It's inevitable that other thoughts will arise, but when you notice them don't try to force them

away; simply bring your attention back to “inhale, exhale.” The second way requires you to extend your focus just a bit farther than “inhale, exhale.” On every exhalation, count the number of your breath, so that on your third exhale for example, you will silently say “three” to yourself, on the seventh exhale, you will say “seven,” and so on up to ten. Then begin counting again from one. Repeat this counting as long as you’d like. The third way is similar to the second, but you do not stop the count at ten and start over; instead, you continue counting each breath in order until you end your meditation. The numbers continue to increase the longer you meditate. Your focus will need to extend farther in this practice, as you will need to keep track of your count throughout the meditation. As with the “inhale, exhale” variation, when extraneous thoughts arise, don’t try to force them away—simply notice and release them, and bring your attention back to your count.

Neither the numbers nor the words “inhale, exhale” have any particular meaning to deepen your meditation. They are not religious or spiritual mantras. They are devices to teach your mind to focus on one thing, or at most two, as some of your attention will be on your proper breath. Anything that narrows the focus of your mind frees it from being distracted by the part of your mind that generates random thoughts. With practice, you’ll come to recognize the distracting parts of your mind even while not meditating, and will become better at quieting them, like a parent calming a crying child. That will allow your mind to sink into deeper parts of itself undisturbed, and along the way to learning more about yourself and your true nature, you’ll enjoy better health by lowering your stress levels and maintaining mental and emotional calm.

At first, don’t tax yourself by trying to meditate too long. If you’ve never meditated, ten minutes is a good length of time to begin with. Don’t get frustrated when your attention wanders or you lose your count. That will happen, and it happens with everyone. It happens less often the more your practice. You may soon find that ten minutes seems too restrictive, and that’s when you should extend your meditation for longer periods. Once you get familiar with and acquire a taste for meditation, a half hour or more will pass very quickly.

6. Standing Practice

Standing practices have been the cornerstone of qi cultivation in many systems of qigong and gongfu (power-building practices used most typically for martial arts purposes, and in some advanced spiritual trainings) for thousands of years. I almost did not include standing in this book, since this practice is best learned as a complete qigong under the guidance of an experienced teacher. Recently, however, the virtues of standing as opposed to sitting, and of standing barefoot on the ground, have caught the attention of Western medical science, and researchers have found an interesting and revealing variety of health benefits from common everyday standing. So it seems like an introduction to this practice is in order, to give you a different perspective on a practice

you might encounter in popular media elsewhere. After taking a look at some Western findings, you'll be given instruction in a basic standing practice commonly used as a preparation for Standing qigong. The practice requires a mindfulness and a specific full-body awareness beyond what the Western researchers studied, and so provides greater health benefits than those of ordinary standing.

Western medical science has determined that people who sit for more than four hours a day have an increased risk of death from natural causes, arising from an increase in obesity and metabolic syndrome (a complex of conditions including high blood pressure, high blood sugar, high cholesterol, and excess body fat around the waist, usually accompanied by fatigue), and includes cardiovascular disease and cancer. That risk increases the more hours per day that a person typically sits. This corroborates the ancient Chinese medical observation that excess sitting damages the Spleen and Stomach, organs associated with absorption and metabolism of nutrients, energy production, proper muscle functionality and strength, and along with other organs is involved in blood production. A poorly functioning Spleen will create Damp in the body, a pathogenic influence frequently involved with various tumor formations and many types of cancer, along with numerous other less serious conditions. Considering that, even common unstructured standing a few times throughout the day is a simple and useful strategy to improve health and longevity.

Evolving Western biosciences have begun examining "earthing" or grounding, the practice of standing preferably barefoot on the ground. These explorations have provided numerous scientific findings related to that simple practice, and many healthful physiologic changes have been demonstrated.

From a Western perspective, energy is usually associated with measurable quantities, such as electrons and ions. Because the skin is a very good electrical conductor, electrons and ions are relatively freely able to pass through it. Remember that the earth is a giant magnet, with a north and south pole, and it generates a lot of free electrons. When walking or standing barefoot on the ground, those electrons are transferred into your body through the soles of your feet. Kidney 1, the acupuncture point called the Bubbling Well point located at the ball of the foot and introduced earlier in this book, is known to be an especially strong conductor of earth energy, and is responsible for all the rising currents of qi within the body.

Free electrons provide many benefits. Foremost, they are very powerful antioxidants and are capable of producing healthful changes in heart rate and reducing inflammation. Decreasing inflammation most obviously reduces inflammatory pain, but inflammation also plays a role in almost every debilitating degenerative disease, including diabetes, heart disease, and cancer. Another factor in heart health, grounding rapidly increases zeta potential, a type of charge around red blood cells that causes the blood to thin,

improving circulation and lowering blood pressure. It also reduces the red blood cells' tendency to clump together, so clots are less likely to form and existing clots may be broken down.

The antioxidant properties of free electrons make them able to quench, or neutralize, excess free radicals. This increases longevity, since free radicals can accelerate aging by causing genetic damage and mutation, damage the energy-producing mitochondria found in every cell, and reduce the efficiency of enzymes, which themselves are both antioxidants and regulators of virtually every biochemical process in the body. This includes the biochemical reactions necessary for all types of healing. Enzyme therapies are sometimes used by practitioners of naturopathic and orthomolecular medicine for that purpose.

Plastic or rubber-soled shoes act as insulators and cut off the flow of free electrons into the feet. This may cause, or at least contribute to, the many diseases of modern life. Free electrons are not the totality of healthy qi, but these findings support what qigong masters have said for millennia: "A wise man breathes through his feet."

You can take advantage of these findings by simply standing more throughout the day, walking barefoot on the earth as much as possible, and if necessary changing your footwear to natural materials that more readily transfer electrons. If you want to maximize those benefits, and add many more beyond the basics of earthing, the following Standing practice will be very rewarding.

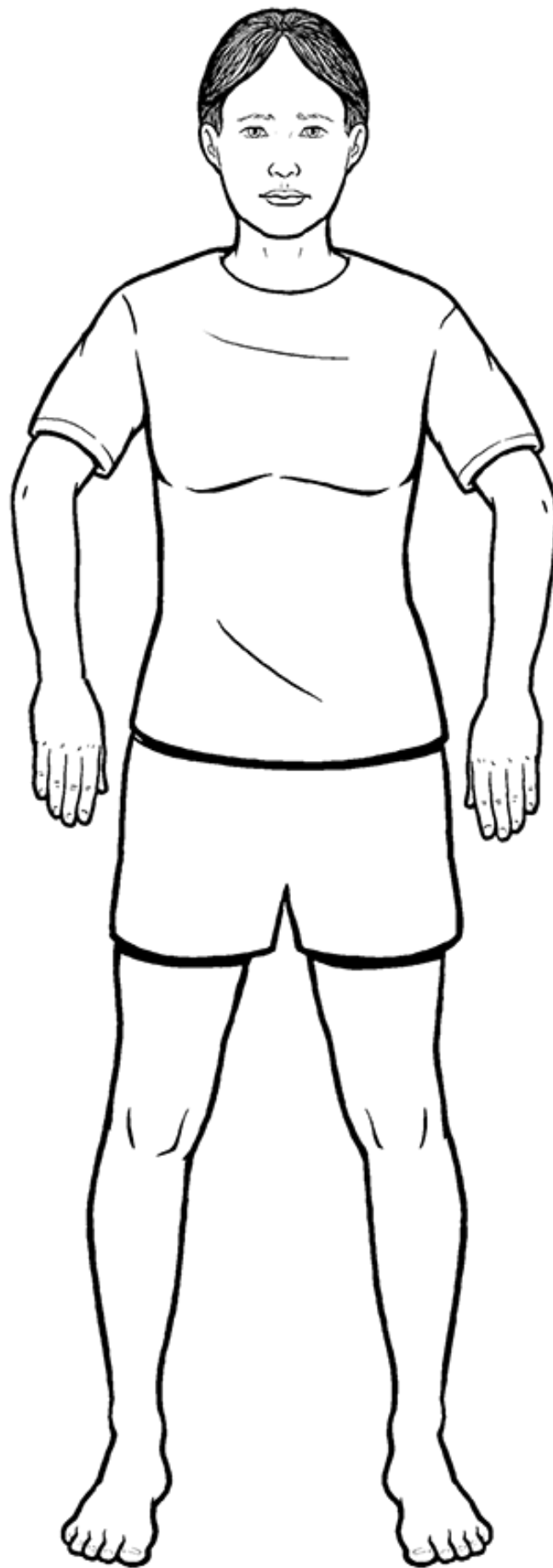
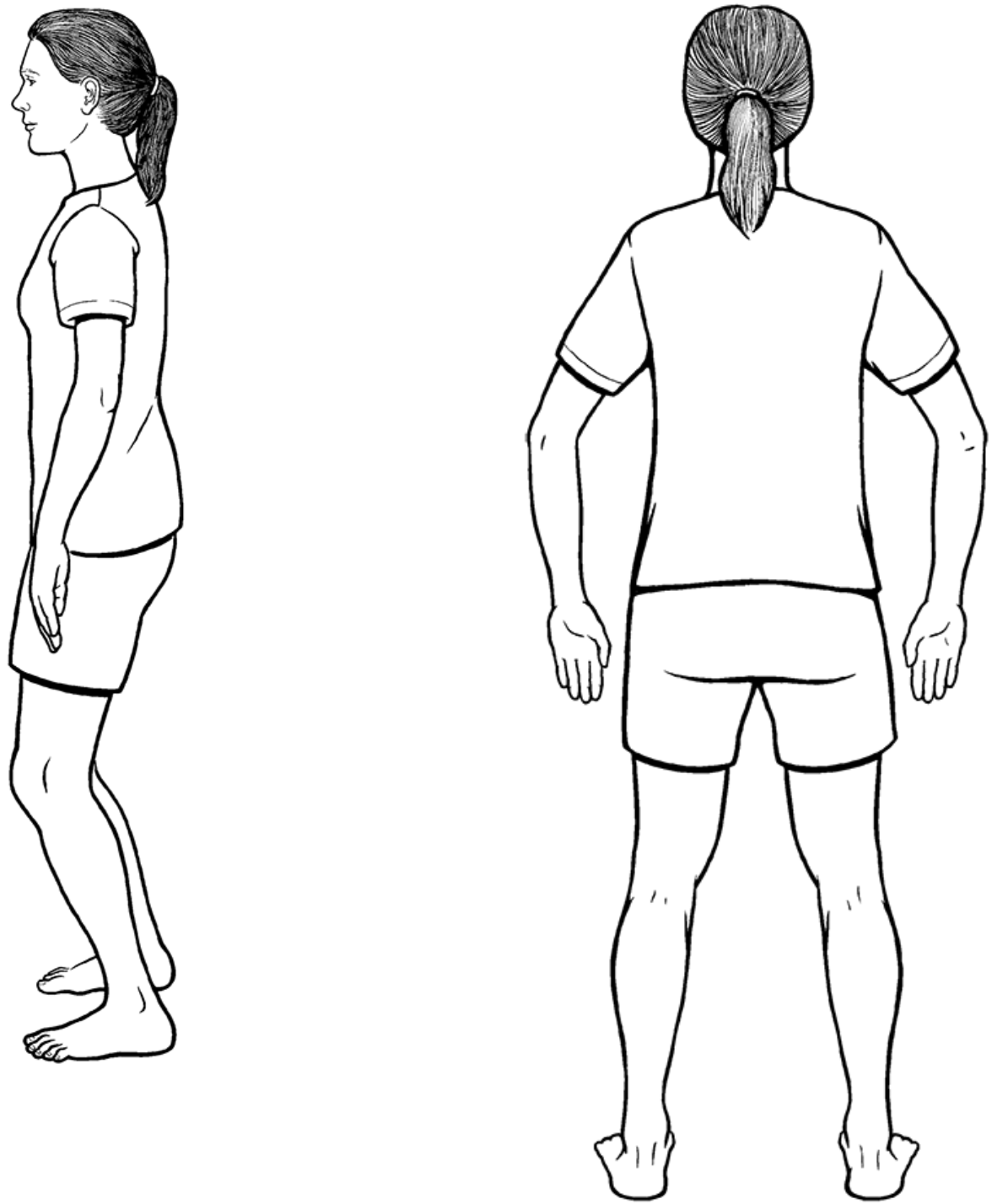


Figure 11.5A (Standing Practice)



Figures 11.5B and 11.5C (Standing Practice)

Method

This most basic Standing posture (Zhan Zhuang, “Standing Like a Stake” or “Pole Standing”) is a foundational practice found in most schools of qigong with minor variations, used in the early stages of qi cultivation as preparation for complete Standing qigong practices. Here the body is regulated even when standing still, when there is very little going on externally that is observable to an untrained eye. It is sometimes referred to as Standing Meditation, but most practitioners simply refer to this as “Standing Practice” or just “Standing” (**Fig 11.5A–Fig 11.5C** on previous pages).

Here are the basic alignments and regulations. Keep in mind, for any one alignment to be fully accomplished, all must eventually be adhered to simultaneously. This may take

some time, even in this early stage of practice. We'll begin at the feet, the body's foundation, and work our way up from there.

- Standing upright, place your feet parallel, at shoulder width apart.
- The weight of the entire body should be spread evenly across the sole of each foot, with no emphasis placed toward either the ball of the foot or the heel. Do not let your ankles collapse inward or outward.
- Bend your knees slightly, keeping them relatively straight but not locked. Even with the knees slightly bent, try to maintain a sense of lift at the back of your knees, so that the whole joint space feels open.
- The knees should bear no weight at all, but rather transfer the weight of the upper body to and through the feet.
- The perineum is kept open, most simply by making sure your knees are not collapsed inward toward a knock-kneed position.
- Point your sacrum straight down to the ground, causing the curvature of the low back to become more flattened. Do this by relaxation and release of any tension in your low back, and not by tightening or tensing the belly.
- Create a slight bend or fold at the inguinal groove. When coupled with the sacrum pointing toward the ground, this has been likened to the sensation of being just about to sit on a stool. That sensation may help give you the correct feeling for this part of the posture, but it can cause a tendency to stick the rear out some. Care must be taken to avoid that, as it will increase the curve in the low back, counter to the above instruction.
- Raise your midriff, by increasing the distance between the iliac crest at the sides of the pelvis and the lowest ribs. This will help you to additionally flatten your lower back.
- Spread your shoulder blades comfortably away from the spine so that the palms of each hand can easily face rearward, with your thumbs lightly touching the sides of your upper thighs. In a common variation, palms face the sides of the thighs, but the shoulder blades are still spread from the spine.
- Your head should lift toward the ceiling with a sense of being drawn upward either magnetically or as if lightly pulled by a string, helping to reduce the curvature of the mid and upper spine while creating a sense of openness and separation between the top vertebra and the base of the skull. So, the lower spine should feel like it's dropping as if to sit, while the mid and upper spine have a sense of rising.
- Keep your jaw parallel to the ground while tucking your chin, drawing it rearward to further lessen the curve of the neck while increasing the gap between the occiput and atlas (first cervical vertebra).

- Place the tip of the tongue on the roof of your mouth, on the hard palate directly behind your upper teeth.
- As much as the mid and upper spine are rising, your chest should feel a commensurate dropping or sinking, without a sense of collapse. The sinking of the chest combined with the spread of the shoulder blades should produce a sense of a hollow or depression forming just toward the midline of the body from the front of the shoulders, as well as an openness in the armpits.
- Keep your belly soft, and your whole body relaxed.

Every aspect of this posture creates openness while in stillness, reducing any physical obstruction to qi flow, so that whatever amount of qi you have available to you at any time will be able to move through you as freely as possible. If you stand barefoot on the ground, all the earthing benefits will be increased. Celestial energies are descending at the same time, and this posture will allow you to access those as well. At this stage of practice, you don't need to think about the earth or celestial energies. Keeping your mind as still as possible will do you the most good.

Similarly, almost every aspect of this posture has a specific purpose in addition to being a part of the synergistic whole. For example, keeping your shoulder blades spread away from your spine releases tension in the muscles between your shoulder blades and allows the vertebrae there to separate slightly. The spinal nerves that exit that part of the spine innervate your heart and lungs, so the separation of those vertebrae removes pressure on the nerves, and your heart and lungs will function better. The back Shu points of the heart and lungs, specific acupuncture points on the Urinary Bladder meridian that influence the function of those organs on a qi level, are also located between the shoulder blades in that region of the back. The softening of that muscle tissue, combined with the slight stimulation from the stretch, encourages more qi flow to the heart and lungs. As an example of synergy, the lengthening of the spine, by pointing your sacrum to the ground while simultaneously lifting your head toward the sky, increases the benefits to your heart and lungs from the spread of your shoulder blades, by increasing the separation of the vertebrae and the flow of qi through the back. Take this as encouragement to incorporate each aspect of the Standing body alignments as precisely as possible.

While you are learning this Standing posture, your mind will necessarily be working to keep track of all the alignments, and to make sure your body stays relaxed while doing so. That's a normal part of this process. At some point, in maybe weeks or months, it will begin to feel very natural to you, and you'll find you won't need to think about it much if at all. You'll feel when you are out of alignment, and will adjust your posture accordingly. When you get to that point, if you want to increase the benefits of Standing, you can

include the Follow Your Breath meditation as part of the practice. This will help to further quiet your mind, and by focusing on your breath, you'll be bringing in more qi from the air (qing qi), your immediate environment, in addition to earth qi and celestial qi. In this case, some of your awareness must still remain on your physical posture.

Twenty minutes is the recommended minimum amount of time for Standing, and many qigong masters encourage their students to stand for an hour or more. In some schools, a teacher may even demand that hour. I know at least one Chinese master who insisted his students do nothing but that, Standing for one hour a day in class for one year before he would even begin to teach them anything more. It is considered that important a practice. You may find Standing to be unexpectedly taxing, though, and in the early stages, if you can only stand for five or ten minutes, that's fine. Do your best to increase that amount of time. The benefits will increase exponentially, not additively.

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Appendix

Exercise Prescriptions for Common Ailments

All Chinese health systems, including acupuncture, herbal medicine, qigong, Chinese dietetics, and the self-care exercises contained here, treat the body holistically. That is to say, while a person may complain of an obvious problem in one part of their body, the cause of that problem may be in another, seemingly entirely unrelated part of the body. The condition of the whole body must be taken into account in order to effect the most complete and stable resolution of the problem.

Accordingly, Chinese treatments usually make use of the principle of “root and branch.” The branch is the obvious symptom, while the root is the actual cause of the symptom. Both are treated simultaneously to alleviate the discomfort in the short term while curing the cause, which can take much longer. In acupuncture, one approach to accomplish that is through the use of local and distal points. In that case, to treat a headache, the patient may be needled in the head, but other needles may be inserted in the feet or hands, for example, in points on meridians related to the location of the cause of the headache. In an herbal formula, some herbs are included to treat the main manifestation, the symptoms of the discomfort or disease, some will target the root source of the imbalance, others target a secondary but related issue, while others ensure that all the herbs work together in concert within the body. This is a necessarily simplified description of these holistic treatments, but gives you the basic idea of what can be involved.

The reader who practices Chinese medicine professionally will recognize those principles at play in these exercise prescriptions. For example, in the case of hearing or other ear problems, the ear exercises will be the given first, but exercises that support the kidneys are also included, since most ear problems are related in some way to kidney function. A strained joint may require attention at the involved joint, but exercises that address the liver and gall bladder are included, since those organs dominate (or have a special relationship with) tendons and ligaments. When those principles are understood, the practitioner of Chinese medicine may freely create other prescriptions in addition to the ones presented here.

For the reader less familiar with the principles of Chinese medicine, the above may help to explain why exercises that seem unrelated to your main complaint are sometimes

included in the prescriptive exercises. It's not so important that you understand why each exercise is selected, only that you practice them as described to the best of your ability. As everyone is a unique individual, do read the entire book carefully. You may find that you resonate with some exercises that have not been specifically recommended for your condition, and your intuition may be guiding you to other helpful practices. There's never any harm you can do to yourself by adding more of these exercises to your regimen.

Those wanting a deeper understanding of the Chinese way of viewing health holistically are directed to *The Web That Has No Weaver*, by Ted Kaptchuk, which offers a Traditional Chinese Medicine perspective, or *Between Heaven and Earth*, by Harriet Beinfield and Efrem Korngold, which presents a Worsley Five Element perspective, slightly different lenses through which to view Chinese health practices. While containing some technical information, both are suitable for the lay reader. Similarly, *The Foundations of Chinese Medicine*, by Giovanni Maciocia, is a more professional-level book for Chinese health care providers, but is written in a straightforward and engaging style so as not to alienate the uninitiated reader.

What follows is a list of common health problems that can be helped by these exercises. The exercises can be used for many more conditions than are presented here. Keep in mind that prevention of a health problem is always preferable to curing one. These exercises work best in that preventive capacity. With that understood, some of the conditions listed below may be completely resolved by these exercises alone, with no other intervention. Some of the more serious conditions like cancer and diabetes cannot be resolved by the use of these exercises alone, but they are useful additions to other therapies and lifestyle modifications. All are extremely beneficial as adjuncts to other therapies used to treat these and many other conditions. All of these exercises may be safely combined with any other medical intervention you may elect to use for your health concerns, conventional Western medicine and alternative approaches alike.

Finally, while this will be common sense to most readers, for others looking for a miracle cure, please keep in mind that if you are doing things that you know are bad for your overall health or a specific condition, adding these exercises will not likely improve your health very much. You have to give yourself every opportunity to improve your health and remedy a health challenge. If you want to lose weight, for example, but continue to eat a high-calorie diet and make other poor nutritional choices, the weight-loss exercises won't help you lose much weight. But if you are following good dietary practices and find you still can't lose the weight you want, these practices will give you the edge you need to achieve your previously elusive goals. Similarly, if you can't sleep because you have noisy neighbors or your spouse snores, your bedroom is too warm, or there's light shining in your window all night, the insomnia exercises won't provide much help for you to get better sleep. If you address those external circumstances and you still

can't sleep, the exercises will help you then. The same principle applies to any health challenge you may want to improve.

While the Whole Body Vibration and Standing practice from chapter 11 may be included as specific recommendations for some conditions, they are so powerful that you should consider including them for every condition.

Exercise Prescriptions

Various conditions

Aches and Pains, General

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing; Yin-Yang Side Bend
- Chapter 11, Dragon Playing with a Pearl; Follow Your Breath Meditation

Aerobic, General Cardiovascular Health (Do all vigorously)

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing
- Chapter 5, Shoulder/Arm Windmills

Allergies, Airborne and Skin

- Chapter 8, Scalp Rake, Nose Exercises (Eye Exercises if eyes are watery or itchy)
- Chapter 9, Thymus Tap
- Chapter 5, Whole Arm Tap and Pat
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians; optional, Dragon Playing with a Pearl

Allergies, Food

- Chapter 8, Red Dragon Dances; Saliva Swish and Swallow; Face Wash and Wipe Down
- Chapter Ten, Entire chapter. If you experience either diarrhea or constipation, choose the variation that is most appropriate to your condition.
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Outer Legs (Yang surfaces), Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces)
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing; Seated Torso Twist; Meridian Back Extension

Arthritis/Bony Aches and Pains

Select the exercises that target your affect joint or joints. Additionally:

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 9, Kidney/Adrenal Tap; Kidney Massage
- Chapter 1, Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point

- Chapter 3, Back of Ankle/Achilles Tendon Stretch
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces)
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians; Qi Storage at the Dantian; Follow Your Breath Meditation, Standing Practice

Asthma/Emphysema

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 6, Yin-Yang Side Bend
- Chapter 9, Thymus Tap
- Chapter 5, Whole Arm Tap and Pat; Shoulder Blade Protraction and Retraction with Arm Rotation; "Breast Stroke" for the Shoulders
- Chapter 9, Kidney/Adrenal Tap; Kidney Massage
- Chapter 1, Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians; Follow Your Breath Meditation

Blood Pressure, High

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration, Standing Practice
- Chapter 1, Ankle Rotations, Ankle Flexion and Extension, Pronation and Supination
- Chapter Seven, all neck exercises except Resistance Exercises
- Chapter 8, all Eye Exercises
- Chapter 5, Nerve and Meridian Stretch/Release
- Chapter 10, The Energetic Practice, second variation
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians; Dragon Playing with a Pearl; Follow Your Breath Meditation

Blood Pressure, Low

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration, Standing Practice
- Chapter 8, Scalp Rake
- Chapter 4, Wrist Rolls
- Chapter 5, Whole Arm Tap and Pat; "Breast Stroke" for the Shoulders; Shoulder/Arm Windmills
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing
- Chapter Seven, all neck exercises
- Chapter 1, Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians

Colds/Flu

- Chapter 8, All Nose Exercises. With head congestion, add Scalp Rake, Temple Massage, Eye Exercises. With ear ache, add Ear Exercises.
- Chapter 9, Thymus Tap, Thyroid Massage
- Chapter 5, Shoulder Rolls, Shoulder Shrug and Drop, "Breast Stroke" for the Shoulders
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing, Yin-Yang Side Bend
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians

Constipation

- Chapter 10, Abdominal Massage, physical, as instructed for constipation
- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Outter Legs (Yang surfaces), Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces), Quadriceps Stretch, Back Rock and Roll
- Chapter 6, Yin-Yang Side Bend, Opposite Leg Toe Touch, the Whole Body Windmill

Diarrhea

- Chapter 10, physical Abdominal Massage, as instructed for diarrhea
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Outter Legs (Yang surfaces), Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces)
- Chapter 5, Prayer Hands Behind Back
- Chapter 11, Dragon Playing with a Pearl; Running the Meridians

Digestive Disorders

- Chapter 10, Abdominal Massage, physical and energetic
- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Outter Legs (Yang surfaces), Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces)
- Chapter 8, Red Dragon Dances, Saliva Swish and Swallow
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing, Yin-Yang Side Bend
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians; Dragon Playing with a Pearl; Follow Your Breath Meditation

Emotional Distress

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration; Dragon Playing with a Pearl; Follow Your Breath Meditation; Standing Practice; Qi Storage at the Dantian
- Chapter 9, Pineal Tap; Pituitary and Hypothalamus Tap

- Chapter 8, Scalp Rake; Temple Massage; Face Wash and Wipe Down

With Fear, add:

- Chapter 8, Beating the Heavenly Drum
- Chapter 9, Kidney/Adrenal Tap; Kidney Massage
- Chapter 1, Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point

With Anger, Irritability, Depression, add:

- Chapter 8, all Eye Exercises
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Outer Legs (Yang surfaces), Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces); Seated Split

With Grief, Sadness, add:

- Chapter 9, Thymus Tap
- Chapter 5, "Breast Stroke" for the Shoulders

With Anxiety, Worry, Lack of ability to stay present and focused: See **Grounding**.

Energy Tonic

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration; Dragon Playing with a Pearl
- Chapter 1, Centerline of Sole Massage; Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing
- Chapter 5, "Breast Stroke" for the Shoulders; Shoulder/Arm Windmills
- Chapter 8, Scalp Rake

Facial Rejuvenation

Primarily for reducing the appearance of fine lines around the eyes and bags under the eyes.

- Chapter 8, all Eye Exercises

Grounding

For improved connection to the energy of the earth in qigong and taiji practices, and for emotional stability and well-being.

- Chapter One, entire chapter
- Chapter 3, Standing Ankle Stretches; Back of Ankle/Achilles Tendon Stretch; Knee Rotations
- Chapter 11, Standing Practice

Gynecological (various), including Female Reproductive/Sexual

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 1, Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces); Seated Split
- Chapter 6, Pelvic Tilt (Forward and Back); Hula Rolls; Seated Torso Twist (second variation)
- Chapter 9, For Women Only—Breast Massage; Kidney/Adrenal Tap; Kidney Massage
- Chapter 10, Abdominal Massage, focus on lower abdomen and below right side of ribs
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians; Follow Your Breath Meditation

Headache, General

- Chapter 8, Scalp Rake; Temple Massage; Beating the Heavenly Drum
- Chapter 9, Pineal Tap; Pituitary and Hypothalamus Tap
- Chapter Seven, all neck exercises
- Chapter 8, Face Wash and Wipe Down

For Migraines, add:

- Chapter 8, all Eye Exercises
- Chapter One, all active ankle exercises
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians

Hearing/Ear Problems

- Chapter 8, Scalp Rake; all Ear Exercises; Teeth Clicking and Tapping
- Chapter 1, Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point
- Chapter 9, Kidney/Adrenal Tap; Kidney Massage
- Chapter 2, Back Rock and Roll
- Chapter 5, Whole Arm Tap and Pat

Heart Problems/Palpitations/Cold Hands and Feet

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing
- Chapter 5, Whole Arm Tap and Pat; Prayer Hands Behind Back; Shoulder/Arm Windmills; Nerve and Meridian Stretch/Release
- Chapter 9, Thymus Tap
- Chapter 11, Dragon Playing with a Pearl
- Chapter 4, Wrist Rolls

Immune Support

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration, Standing Practice
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing
- Chapter 5, Shoulder/Arm Windmills
- Chapter 9, Thymus Tap
- Chapter 8, Nose Exercises

Insomnia

During the course of daytime practice:

- Chapter Eleven, entire chapter
- Chapter 9, Pineal Tap; Pituitary and Hypothalamus Tap
- Chapter Seven, entire chapter

Shortly before bedtime:

- Chapter 8, Scalp Rake; Temple Massage; Face Wash and Wipe Down
- Chapter One, all active ankle exercises

Low Back Pain

Depending on the degree of pain you are experiencing, all exercises may be modified as described in the main exercise sections. With whatever modifications may be necessary, do all of the exercises listed below.

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter Six, entire chapter
- Chapter 2, One-Leg Hamstring Stretch; Two-Leg Hamstring Stretch (if possible); Hip Rotator Stretch; Back Rock and Roll
- Chapter 9, Kidney/Adrenal Tap; Kidney Massage
- Chapter 1, Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point

Mental Focus/Concentration

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration; Standing Practice
- Chapter 8, Scalp Rake; Temple Massage; all Eye Exercises and Ear Exercises
- Chapter 9, Pineal Tap; Pituitary and Hypothalamus Tap; Kidney/Adrenal Tap
- Chapter Seven, all neck exercises except Resistance Exercises
- Chapter 1, Toe Pinch, Stretch, and Twist; Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point
- Chapter 11, Dragon Playing with a Pearl; Follow Your Breath Meditation

Muscle aches and pains/sprains/trauma

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Outer Legs (Yang surfaces), Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces)
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing, done moderately
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians; Dragon Playing with a Pearl

Select other exercises for the affected body part(s), taking care to do them gently, especially in the case of recent injury.

Neck and Upper Back Pain

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter Seven, entire chapter
- Chapter 5, Shoulder Rolls; Shoulder Shrug and Drop; Shoulder Blade Protraction and Retraction with Arm Rotation; Hand Over Shoulder Stretch; "Breast Stroke" for the Shoulders; Shoulder/Arm Windmills

Reproductive/ Urogenital/ Sexual Health

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 1, Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces); Seated Split
- Chapter 6, Pelvic Tilt (Forward and Back); Hula Rolls; Meridian Back Extension; Seated Torso Twist
- Chapter 9, Breast Massage; Prostate Massage; Kidney/Adrenal Tap; Kidney Massage
- Chapter 3, Back of Ankle/Achilles Tendon Stretch; Knee Rotations
- Chapter 11, Running the Meridians; Follow Your Breath Meditation; Standing Practice

Stress

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration; Standing Practice
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing
- Chapter 8, all Eye Exercises
- Chapter 8, Scalp Rake; Temple Massage; Face Wash and Wipe Down
- Chapter 9, Kidney/Adrenal Tap; Kidney Massage
- Chapter 11, Dragon Playing with a Pearl; Running the Meridians; Follow Your Breath Meditation

Teeth and Gums

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration—make sure teeth chatter
- Chapter 8, Mouth Exercises
- Chapter One, seated toe stretches
- Chapter 9, Kidney/Adrenal Tap; Kidney Massage
- Chapter 10, Abdominal Massage, physical. For tender or bleeding gums.

Tendinitis/RSI/Wrist and Hand Pain/Carpal Tunnel

Pains in the fingers, hands, wrists, and forearms almost always have contributing or causative problems farther up the arms, in the shoulders, upper back, and neck, so in the absence of a professional, thorough, and objective diagnosis, all are addressed for best results.

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter Four, entire chapter
- Chapter 5, Shoulder Rolls; Shoulder Shrug and Drop; Hand Over Shoulder Stretch; “Breast Stroke” for the Shoulders; Shoulder/Arm Windmills; Whole Arm Tap and Pat; Kneeling Forearm Stretch; Nerve and Meridian Stretch/Release
- Chapter Seven, entire chapter

For Tennis Elbow/Elbow Pain, add:

- Chapter 5, Full Arm Rotation for Elbow and Shoulderblades

Vision/Eye Problems

- Chapter 8, Scalp Rake; Temple Massage; all Eye Exercises; Beating the Heavenly Drum, second variation
- Chapter 9, Pineal Tap;
- Chapter Seven, all neck exercises except Resistance Exercise
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Outer Legs (Yang surfaces), Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces)
- Chapter 6, Yin-Yang Side Bend

Weight Loss

- Chapter 11, Whole Body Vibration
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing; Opposite Leg Toe Touch, the Whole Body Windmill; Hula Rolls
- Chapter 5, Shoulder/Arm Windmills
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Outer Legs (Yang surfaces), Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces), Quadriceps Stretch

- Chapter 10, Abdominal Massage
- Chapter 9, Pituitary and Hypothalamus Tap; Thyroid Massage

More Serious Conditions: Cancer, Diabetes, MS

Chinese self-care exercises will not cure these serious conditions on their own, but they will provide some measure of relief, and they will also add another useful modality to move the body toward restored health. These conditions impact the body at a very deep level, so all of the exercises in chapter 11 should be practiced. They each have the broadest health effects, and of the exercises contained in this book, influence the body on the subtlest levels.

These conditions may also cause a variety of secondary problems, such as insomnia, stress, digestive disorders, and emotional upsets. You may include exercises from those protocols with those given below. You will see that some of the exercise from those protocols are already included, to address or prevent the occurrence of those secondary conditions.

Cancer

- Chapter 9, Thymus Tap; Pituitary and Hypothalamus Tap; Kidney/Adrenal Tap; Kidney Massage
- Chapter 1, entire Foot, Seated: Series One set; Centerline of Sole Massage; Palm Rub, Laogong to Yongquan; Pumping the Bubbling Well Point
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Outer Legs (Yang surfaces), Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces)
- Chapter 5, Whole Arm Tap and Pat; "Breast Stroke" for the Shoulders; Shoulder/Arm Windmills (omit these last two in the case of breast cancer).

Diabetes

- Chapter 8, Red Dragon Dances; Saliva Swish and Swallow
- Chapter 9, Pituitary and Hypothalamus Tap; Thyroid Massage
- Chapter 10, Abdominal Massage
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing

MS

- Chapter 5, Whole Arm Tap and Pat; Nerve and Meridian Stretch/Release
- Chapter 6, Torso Twist with Arm Swing
- Chapter 2, Tapping and Patting the Outer Legs (Yang surfaces), Tapping and Patting the Inner Legs (Yin surfaces)
- Chapter 8, Four Directions Eye Exercise

- Consider adding all of chapters Four and Five, beneficial in most cases of MS.

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Glossary

Baduanjin, Ershiduanjin

Ba is the number eight, and ershi is the number twelve. The remaining two syllables, duanjin, means “golden brocades,” implying something both beautiful and valuable. The original Eight Golden Brocades is a very old eight-movement qigong set performed while standing. It became the foundation for many subsequent qigong practices, which follow a similar sequence, but may not be named in a way that reveals that origin. There is also a seated version of the Eight Golden Brocades. That and the Twelve Golden Brocades were developed later, and have little practical connection to the Eight Brocades.

The Seated and Twelve Brocades are not true qigongs, at least not the versions I’ve seen, but they are useful, health-building practices, frequently taught as warm-ups or adjuncts to other practices. Some of those are included in this book. The original Eight Golden Brocades is a true qigong, but there are many versions and variations which have removed some of the components that make it such. Again, even those variations are useful, and one or two are included in this book.

Core Channels

See *Energetic Anatomy*.

Daimai

The Daimai, or Girdling or Belt meridian, is one of the Eight Extraordinary meridians. It’s the only meridian that has a horizontal trajectory around the torso, intersecting all the twelve regular meridians, and the remaining seven of the Eight Extraordinary meridians. As the Girdling meridian, one of its main functions is to bind and stabilize all the other meridians, and in that capacity it has a positive effect on the entire body. It also intersects the Dantian in the front of the body, and the kidneys and the Mingmen—“the Gate of Vitality” or “Life Gate Fire”—at the rear of the body.

All of the Extraordinary meridians serve as reservoirs of Qi and Blood. Due in part to its location and intersections, the Daimai influences all reproductive health and plays a particularly beneficial role in gynecological health.

Dantian

The Dantian is one of the main energy centers in the body. Although there are three primary Dantians—upper, middle, and lower—when the word is used alone without any stipulation, it's almost always the lower Dantian being referred to. That's because the lower Dantian has the most to do with physical functions, health, and vitality, so it has most to do with everyday life and with the interests of the majority of people involved in energy practices.

It is located a couple of inches below the navel, and two to three inches in from the surface of your body. It serves as the main reservoir of the energy acquired through various qi practices. Storing qi at the Dantian is an important part of all qigong practices, and of many other energy practices, as the way to have a net gain of energy at the end of the day, held stable and secure so that it does not simply dissipate.

The word Dantian literally translates as "elixir field." "Elixir" is a precious substance that imparts good health and long life, and in many cultures it is referenced as something that can maintain life indefinitely. As it is used here, "field" is synonymous with an arable pasture where nourishing crops may be planted. So, the Dantian is likened to a field in which the seeds of life and vitality may be planted, so that they may grow into an abundant source of life energy, able to be harvested and used as needed.

Daoist Yoga

There are a few practices called Daoist yoga that may be encountered today. One is less common, more in the realm of an advanced qigong and meditation practice, focusing on the Eight Extra meridians for psychic and spiritual cultivation. This book does not include anything from that practice. A couple of them are quite similar to each other, a little more common, and may superficially look like Hatha and other traditional Indian or contemporary Westernized yogas.

Those two Daoist yogas involve held stretches or a flowing series of moving postures more reminiscent of Indian yogas. Since Daoist yogas all include an aspect of qi regulation, the moving yogas come close to being qigong practices. The qi regulation and attention to the specific health goals and benefits are a couple of things that may distinguish these from their Indian counterparts. This book primarily includes stationary held-posture Daoist yoga.

In Daoist yoga any increase in a stretch only occurs through release of tight or held muscles, not through actively using even the slightest force. That release is accomplished by combining at least three factors. The first is the use of your breath, which is directed to a tight muscle or region on an inhale, and the tension is released to whatever degree is possible on the exhale, leaving your body along with the breath. Numerous directed breaths can be done to facilitate this process. The second factor is the influence of gravity. As you engage in any stretching practice, gravity will usually play a role in increasing the stretch. Its felt influence will allow it to open your body into a deeper

stretch. The third factor is your mind. Some part of your mind must contact the tense, tight, or held muscle, and be used to soften and release that held tension. There is no physical effort involved by engaging your mind in this aspect, and it is significantly different than using only your breath and gravity, both kinesthetically and energetically. The stretch occurring through release and let go comes from the nervous system, releasing held tension there as well, and so is a deeper stretch than one involving muscles alone, even if the outer movement appears to be less.

Daoyin

The main purpose of Daoyin is to get the qi to move, and to direct it where you want it to go within your body.

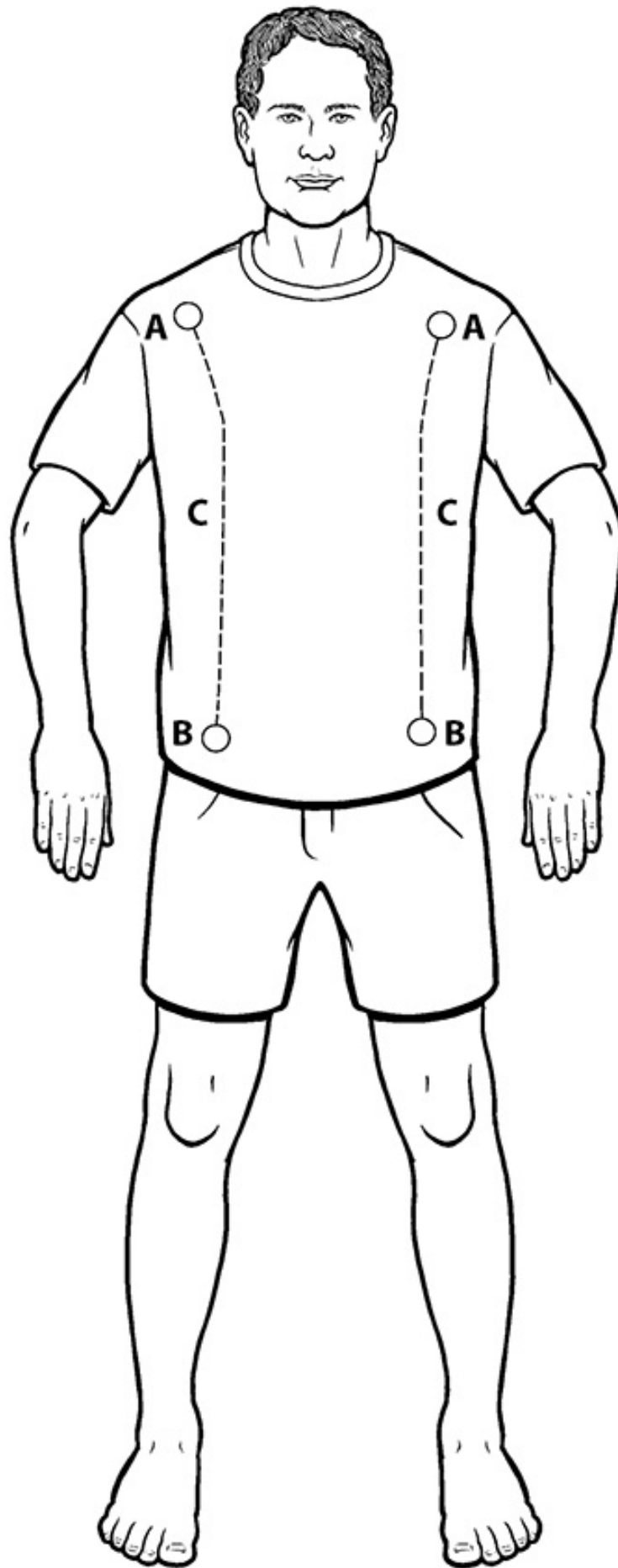
The word daoyin is one of many used to refer to qigong-like practices before the word qigong was coined in the early 1950s. It literally means, "to induce and guide." Unlike with true qigong practices, this inducing and guiding will not give you a net gain of qi, but will give you better use of the qi you already have, and free up some otherwise unusable qi. This is typically accomplished in one of two ways.

The first way is more biomechanical. Qi can be induced to move and be guided through acupuncture techniques, either performed by a therapist for a client or patient, or as self-massage practices may be used on oneself. The second way is more advanced, in which the induction and guiding is done entirely by the mind for oneself. This is the method used as a component of many qigongs, and of some meditation practices. This book primarily makes use of the first method, and occasionally moves into an intermediate stage where acupuncture and mental guidance are used simultaneously.

Energetic Anatomy: Shoulder's Nest, Kwa, Core Channels, Laogong, Yongquan

"Shoulder's Nest" and "Kwa" are terms used in Chinese healing and martial arts to identify two important anatomical and energetic body regions. They share some similar characteristics.

The Shoulder's Nest is located where each arm joins the torso, deep within the body. Its lower border is near the center of the armpit, and its forward, front border is at the depression formed when you roll your shoulders forward, just to the medial, chest side of your shoulder (**Fig G-1A**). Superficially, many muscles attach at or pass through the Shoulder's Nests. Deeper, it is the site of numerous lymph nodes and vessels, which influence the health of the immune system. Other significant local anatomical structures include veins, arteries, nerves, and the apex of the lungs. Accordingly, supple and open Shoulder's Nests have a positive effect on blood flow, transmission of nerve impulses, and fuller, healthier lung functions.



Figures G-1A–G-1C (Energetic Anatomy: >Shoulder’s Nest, Kwa, Core Channels, Laogong, Yongquan)

The Shoulder’s Nest is also an energetic structure, a body cavity capable of amplifying

qi flow, and the site of the first external acupuncture points of both the Lung and Heart meridians. Used in taiji and various qigong practices, it is the region that connects the left and right side channels from the torso to the arms.

The Kwa is located where each leg joins the torso, deep within the center of the inguinal crease. The lower external border of the Kwa is the center of the inguinal crease, while the upper border is below and deep to the outer edges of the pubic bone (**Fig G-1B** on previous page). As in the Shoulder's Nests, the Kwa is the anatomical site of many lymph nodes and vessels, and veins and arteries. It is another primary energetic structure, a body cavity capable of greatly amplifying qi flow, and the region where the side channels connect from the torso to the legs.

The line between the left Shoulder's Nest and left Kwa delineates the left channel within the torso, while the line between the right Shoulder's Nest and right Kwa delineates the Right Channel (**Fig G-1C** on previous page). Note that they are not often completely parallel lines, as an individual may have wide shoulder and narrow hips, narrow shoulders and wide hips, and a range of variability between those extremes. These two side channels and a third central channel are used in various energy practices, martial and medical arts, and are the Core Channels from which the regular acupuncture meridians arise.

One of the most energetically sensitive regions of the body is a palm point called Laogong, used in sensing, absorbing, and projecting qi in various qigong, medical, and martial practices. As it is the eighth point on the Pericardium meridian, it is also called Pericardium 8, or simply P8. When you make a soft fist, the point is located where the tip of the ring finger touches your palm, near the center of your palm (**Fig G-2**).

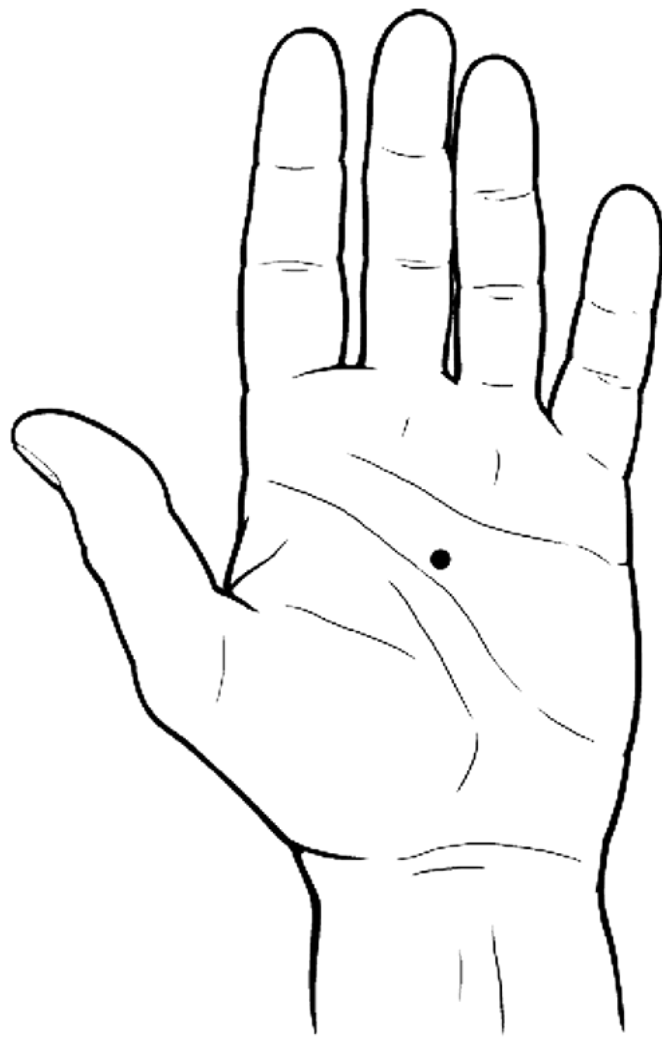


Figure G-2 (Energetic Anatomy: Shoulder's Nest, Kwa, Core Channels, Laogong, Yongquan)



Figure G-3 (Energetic Anatomy: Shoulder's Nest, Kwa, Core Channels, Laogong, Yongquan)

A corresponding point is found on the sole of the foot, on the centerline just below the ball of the foot (**Fig G-3** on previous page). This is called Yongquan, or the Bubbling Well point. Since it's the first point on the Kidney meridian, it's also called Kidney 1 or simply K1. Most people do not actively sense with their feet, but this is also a very energetically sensitive point, and is used most to open and activate the Kidney meridian, and to draw earth qi up into the body, although with practice qi may be equally projected from this point. As the first point on the Kidney meridian, it governs all the ascending flows of qi in the body. Laogong and Yongquan are used in many of the Chinese self-care exercises for their energetic value. It is recommended that you become familiar with them, so that you can easily locate and use them when referred to in the exercise instructions.

Ershiduanjin

See *Baduanjin*, *Ershiduanjin*.

Five Element/Five Phase

Over the millennia, many philosophical systems evolved through which Chinese medicine and related healing, martial, and spiritual arts have been viewed and practiced. One of the oldest, and possibly the most purely Daoist, is the Five Element or Five Phase approach.

The Chinese five elements—Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water—represent unique energetic qualities and derive from observations of the natural transitions in energetic states over time, from the hours of the day to the seasons of the year, through the twelve-year cycle of the Chinese zodiacal/astrological calendar. In the most comprehensive reckonings, each element has nearly forty attributes assigned to it.

The number twelve fits into the Five Element configuration when we take into account that Fire has a subdivision, Supplemental Fire, giving a sort of "sixth element," and each element has a yin and yang aspect, yielding twelve distinct energetic parts. Within the body, each part has an associated organ with its accompanying meridian, accounting for the twelve regular meridians. Every day, each organ/meridian system has a two hour period of ascendancy, when its qi is most abundant within the twenty-four-hour daily cycle.

There are also associated Five Element directions: North (Water), South (Fire), East (Wood), and West (Metal), and they have related energetic qualities. The Earth element occupies either the center position, or a small transitional slice between each of the cardinal points, depending on the chosen Five Element application. This reflects the understanding that Earth Element practices are either centering and grounding, or harmonizing and unifying, often doing both simultaneously.

In classic Five Element acupuncture, sixty points are selected for primary use from among the 360 or so commonly used in other systems, with five points, one associated

with each element, on each of the twelve regular meridians. Those points are located between the elbow and fingertips, and between the knee and tips of the toes. This is because in certain periods of Chinese history, it was considered improper for a noblewoman to expose any more of her body than that, even to a physician, so an effective acupuncture system had to be developed for use within those strictures. There are other points in the forearms and lower leg available to Five Element (and other) acupuncturists, and contemporary Five Element acupuncturists will sometimes use more than those points too, but those sixty have a special prominence within that system.

As elegant as the Five Element system is, its complexities are beyond what's needed for you to benefit from these exercises. In this book, the classic Five Element points are used in a variety of exercises, and their characteristics and functions will be described within the context of each exercise. Their names, from fingertips to elbow and from toe tips to knees, are Jing Well, Ying Spring, Shu Stream, Jing River, and He Sea. Just as water increases in volume and power from Well to Sea, the qi in your body similarly grows, from the extremities to the knees and elbows.

Focused Breathing

Focused Breathing is an introductory stage of the breathing practices found in qigong, meditation, and some styles of yoga. It can be used as a stand-alone approach to improve health, longevity, and self-awareness. One translation of qi is "breath." This indicates that the movement, quality, and acquisition of qi is associated with breath, so there is an energetic aspect to Focused Breathing even in the introductory stages.

Focused Breathing as it is used here means putting some of your attention on your breathing, for a few different purposes. You may use your attention to direct the energy of your breath to a particular body part, including the internal organs, to get that body part to release held tension, relax, and become more open. You can use your attention to increase the volume and slow the rate of your overall breath, in order to help calm your nervous system. Finally, you can focus on the rate, rhythm, and quality of your breath to quiet your mind and enter into a light meditative state. In all aspects of Focused Breathing, your emotions are affected and will become more balanced and even.

Kwa

See Energetic Anatomy.

Laogong

See Energetic Anatomy.

Meridian, Channel, and Muscle-Tendon (M-T) Meridian

Meridians or Channels are the primary energy pathways through which qi circulates, similar to the way blood vessels are the primary pathways for circulating blood. The

words meridian and channel are used interchangeably.

The twelve main meridians connect with and directly influence the functions of all the internal organs. There are discrete points along those meridians, which are the points an acupuncturist will needle to influence qi flow and restore the body to a harmonious, balanced state of health. Pressure or other stimulation applied to those points will similarly influence qi flow and health, and are used in some of the exercises found here.

Overlaying the regular meridians are the muscle-tendon (M-T) meridians. They follow the same basic pathway as the regular meridians, but are broader and more superficial. As their name implies, they most affect the health of the muscles and tendons. Any focused stretch will directly influence the M-T meridians, and by extension, the underlying regular meridians. While it is most common to treat the regular meridians, the M-T meridians are frequently palpated diagnostically (especially to find ahshi points, or points of painful obstruction) and treated directly in sports and orthopedic acupuncture. All of the stretches in this book influence the M-T meridians.

Neigong

See Qigong, Neigong.

Paidagong and Vibration Practices

The main purpose of paidagong and other vibration-style techniques is to break up small and large regions of qi stagnation and obstruction in both body tissues and energy pathways. That frees up bound energy so that the usable portion may be made accessible and diverted back into healthful purposes, while the unusable pathogenic qi can be released out of the body. In that way, pain is reduced, functionality is improved, and a person will feel energized by having access to more usable qi. When combined with other practices such as daoyin, the obstructed qi that was broken up can be quickly moved out of that location, greatly minimizing the possibility that the pocket of stagnation will simply re-form.

While not a hard and fast rule in practice, the main distinction between paidagong and other vibrational practices is that paidagong—tapping and patting on various body parts—can have a narrower focus, creating vibrational energy through a smaller, targeted body part; other vibrational practices are broader, creating vibrational waves through one or more limbs simultaneously or through the entire body all at once. Otherwise, their underlying principles, purposes, and outcomes are nearly identical. Light and sound are other types of vibrational energies able to be used therapeutically, but their applications are outside of the scope of this book.

Vibration is one of the distinguishing characteristics of Chen style taiji, perhaps the oldest, original form of that martial art. Vibration is integral to the way qi is moved and directed in that form. In contrast, most other forms of taiji, including the popular Yang

style, utilize smooth, flowing, and continuous movements exclusively.

As a side note, some alternative Western medical practices recognize qi stagnation and obstruction as the root cause of many diseases, even if their terminology is somewhat different. In Zero Balancing (ZB), created by acupuncturist and osteopath Fritz Smith, MD, "standing wave forms" may be identified and released to restore healthful balance in a patient, while in Craniosacral therapy (CST), created by osteopath John Upledger, DO, OMM, "energy cysts" are similarly identified and treated. (Some of these are related to the "ah shi" points introduced with M-T meridians above, since both can be found on or off of acupuncture meridians. Ah shi points are always painful when pressure is applied to them, though, while standing wave forms and energy cysts may or may not be obviously painful.) While neither ZB nor CST use paidagong, each has its own methods of inducing energetic movement to break up those regions of qi stagnation and obstruction.

Energy can become obstructed from numerous causes, including prolonged emotional states, environmental factors, poor diet, and as side effects of many medications and recreational drugs. Perhaps the most common way, and easiest for most Westerners to understand, is from traumatic injury. The energy of the trauma may cleanly pass through the person entirely, but damage some physical tissue along the way, breaking bones or causing bruising. Almost any physical injury will cause Blood Stasis, a reduction or cessation of blood flow either within a blood vessel or when extravasated, pooling outside a blood vessel, with either accompanying overt visible bruising or microtrauma with no observable bruise. There is always qi stagnation where there is Blood Stasis. Conversely, some or most of that traumatic energy may lodge in the body and cause progressively worsening health.

In the point-strike martial art of dim mak, one method the martial artist learns is to strike in such a way that the energy of the strike does not pass through the opponent, as is more common in most martial arts, but rather lodges within the opponent's body, creating pockets of qi stagnation. This can be particularly incapacitating when striking a targeted acupuncture point or sensitive internal organ. The internal damage from such a strike increases over time, often very rapidly. Among the many rumors surrounding Bruce Lee's death, is the speculation that this was truly responsible for killing the famous martial artist, who died at age 32, just weeks after receiving such a strike from an angry martial artist. Even in a person who never practices a martial art, the energy from any traumatic injury or other causes cited in the previous paragraph may similarly lodge in their body and cause lingering pain and increasing debility, unless properly treated.

Qi

The word qi (pronounced "chee") was formerly, and is sometimes still, seen transliterated into English as ch'í or chi. With or without the apostrophe, they are two different words, with different meanings, that have occasionally been incorrectly used to

mean the same thing. The spelling “qi” eliminates that confusion. It is most simply translated as “energy,” but has many more, broader, implications.

Qi is both the most fundamental substance and the motivational force underlying everything in existence. This is very similar to the Western physics understanding of a photon, which exists as both a particle (substance) and a wave (a state of energy). The Chinese use the word in many contexts. For example, it may be used to refer to an attribute of changing weather patterns (weather qi), emotional states (emotion qi), and when referring to air itself, as in “pumping qi into a tire.”

For the purposes of health and functionality, regarding qi within the body we’ll use the understandings of it as “vitality,” “life energy,” or “life force,” as qi is what animates us, gives us drive, will, awareness, and intellect. In this book, “qi” and “energy” are frequently used interchangeably.

“Breath” is another possible translation for qi, which is why the word “qigong” is sometimes interpreted as “breathing exercises.” Since breath involves the inhalation of air, and is necessary for life, we can see the associations of life and air with that interpretation. So, while ordinary breath is only a partial aspect of qi, and breathing is only one component of qigong, some attention to breath is necessary in any health-building practice. Focused Breathing is included in this book for just that reason, as a means to facilitate and increase the benefits of any exercise in which it is used.

Within the body, qi may stagnate or become obstructed, run counter to its normal trajectory, become deficient or excessive, and exhibit other deviations that will cause specific pathological symptoms.

Qigong, Neigong

The word qigong is made from combining two separate Chinese words, qi and gong. Qi has been described above. Gong is commonly translated as “practice,” more fully understood to mean “effort put into any discipline over a period of time to achieve a desired result.” This understanding of practice is similar to the way we might use the word to mean practicing a musical instrument, or setting up a medical practice. Both require investing a substantial amount of time in order to gain the necessary skill to achieve some degree of accomplishment. So qigong may be defined as “putting effort into working with your life energy over a period of time, in order to acquire more of it, keep it moving freely, and direct it at will to where it’s most needed to ensure health and vitality.”

The word nei means “inner” or “internal.” Neigong works with physical and energetic structures deep within the body, which are capable of greatly amplifying qi flow. Along the continuum of qi practices, most neigong is more advanced than practices that are identified as qigong.

There are no true qigong or neigong practices taught in this book, but they are referred

to at times as supplementary information for people who already have such training and practice, and to introduce a clear understanding of those things for people unfamiliar with them. Some of these exercises, when performed slowly with attention to even more careful and specific body movements, and with more focus on breathing, keeping a quiet mind, and sensing and moving qi, either are or can be practiced as a qigong. For example, done in such a way, the Shoulder/Arm Windmill exercise found in chapter 5 is used to bring Yin qi from the earth up the center of the body, and Yang qi from the sky down the sides of the body, and vice versa. Qigong is not simply a matter of performing the movement itself. In this book, only the easiest version of a practice is taught, so that everyone may benefit equally in the manner described for each exercise.

On the whole, qigong of any sort is frequently simple on the surface, but to gain all its benefit, a considerable amount of time and effort needs to be invested in study and practice. In fact, a sequence of one or two to six or eight movements, common in most qigongs, really needs to be studied under the guidance of an experienced teacher many times, in regular weekly classes that may last for months or longer, or in retreat/workshops for a few full days to a few weeks at a time to layer in all the deeper energetic aspects of a true qigong, and practiced for many months or years to embody each part before the next one can be added in. This is one main reason why qigong can seldom be effectively learned from a book or video format.

At this point it will be helpful to make some distinctions between qigong and Chinese self-care exercises. While all qigong practiced for oneself is self-care, self-care exercises are not qigong. Of those that are sometimes taught as qigong, none are truly complete qigongs. One could make the argument that anything that influences qi is a qigong, but that's not the case. Qigong practices are very specific things, with specific criteria, including among other things the coordinated regulation of the body, breath, and mind, leading to the direct, conscious regulation of qi.

This is not to say that there is no energetic benefit coupled with the physical benefit from these self-care practices. Acupuncture, acupressure, and Shiatsu all influence the body's qi in positive, health-building ways, yet no one refers to them as qigong. It's also not meant to diminish the value of these exercises in any way. In fact, their relative simplicity and effectiveness is exactly why I gathered and organized them in this book. The distinction is made only for the purpose of clarification, so that you have a better understanding of what you are learning here, and how that may be distinguished from qigong should you decide to learn that further down the road.

Rotational Stretch

The main purpose of Rotational Stretch is to provide more planes of motion through the stretched body part, creating both physical and energetic openness along many more pathways and trajectories than is possible in a linear stretch alone. This provides a much

greater opportunity for healing an injured body part, and for increasing overall functionality to reduce the likelihood of injury in the first place.

In an active linear stretch, when one muscle contracts, its antagonistic muscle (the muscle that performs the opposite action) will then be stretched. For example, when a bicep contracts in a flex, bending your elbow, the tricep will be stretched. When the tricep contracts, straightening your elbow, the bicep will be stretched. Another variation of the active stretch is achieved by using one body part to actively stretch another, as when you sit on the floor, extend your legs, grab your ankles or your feet with both hands, and pull to stretch your low back and hamstring muscles.

In a passive linear stretch, body weight and gravity are used, and no muscle needs to actively contract to perform the stretch, as in a common standing toe touch. In this case, though, the stretched muscles will need to contract in order to return you to an upright position. A linear stretch is sometimes the most desirable, effectively targeting the involved body part in the most advantageous way. Many are included in this book.

In a Rotational Stretch, the linear lengthening of muscle tissue will always be accompanied by a gently wringing twist of those muscle tissues around bone. The action of the involved muscles will be like a corkscrew, the uncoiling or the winding up of a spring, or like the perceived spiral of the stripe rising up an old-fashioned barber shop pole which exhibits no obvious lengthening, depending on the type of Rotational Stretch. In some cases, as in the Rotational Stretches used in the advanced practice of neigong, there may be no obvious, outwardly observable linear lengthening, and the lengthening will only be internal. Similarly, there may be no observable Rotational Stretch, which will nevertheless be happening internally. In this book, the external lengthening is always present in an observable Rotational Stretch.

Rotational stretches are found in the practice of Wu style taiji and are used extensively in bagua. They are one important way those practices strongly open a body physically, increase energetic capacity, improve health, and promote longevity.

Shoulder's Nest

See Energetic Anatomy.

Yongquan

See Energetic Anatomy.

Recommended Reading

Qigong:

Opening the Energy Gates of Your Body, by B. K. Frantzis; North Atlantic Books

Mastering Miracles, by Dr. Hong Liu; Warner Books

The Roots of Chinese Qigong, by Jwing-Ming Yang, YMAA Publications

Harnessing the Power of the Universe, by Daniel Reid; Shambhala

The Way of Qigong, by Kenneth S. Cohen; Ballentine Books

Chinese Medicine:

The Web That Has No Weaver, by Ted Kaptchuk; Congdon & Weed

Between Heaven and Earth, by Harriet Beinfield and Efrem Korngold; Ballentine Books

The Foundations of Chinese Medicine, by Giovanni Maciocia; Churchill Livingstone

General:

Earthing, by Clinton Ober, Stephen Sinatra, Martin Zucker; Basic Health Publications

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