

How Much to Practice

The right amount of practice always depends on your physical condition. When hospitalized or recuperating at home, three to four times a day for thirty minutes at a time is best. When one is working half-days, or otherwise working a full day after recovering from an illness, once a day or twice a day for thirty minutes at a time is sufficient.

There is no set duration or number of days which Relaxation Qigong should be practiced. Generally, however, you should keep practicing with the understanding that it takes two or three months of regular practice before lasting benefits can be realized.

Inner Regulation Qigong 内养功

The Effects

Inner Regulation Qigong, which belongs to the Passive Qigong category, is one of the main Qigong exercises. Historically, this method of Qigong was orally transmitted in China from one generation to the next by a Qigong master teaching only his best disciple. This secret method for health and longevity was first made available to the public in 1947 after Dr. Liu Gui-zhen, with the help of his associates Li Wei-hua and Chang You-tian, persuaded Liu Du-zhou, a Qigong master from the Hebei Province, to reveal his secret. After reorganizing these secret practices into a simpler formula, Dr. Liu began teaching this simplified method to patients in hospitals and found that his formula had a remarkable therapeutic effect. He published his findings and popularized this method as Neiyangong [内养功], or Inner Regulation Qigong. It has since become one of the most basic approaches among the many varieties of Passive Qigong.

The main feature of Inner Regulation Qigong is that brain activity is slowed down while the function of internal organs are heightened by placing emphasis on silently repeating a phrase to yourself and concentrating on the Dantian point (lower abdomen). Since this Qigong exercise strengthens the internal organs, it has a very marked effect in curing or preventing diseases of the digestive system such as ulcers, gastroptosis, and chronic constipation, in addition to diseases of the respiratory system. Also, this Qigong exercise is widely practiced because it is known to have a remarkable effect in improving people's physical constitution and prolonging life.

How to Practice

The practice of Inner Regulation Qigong is based on the following five principles or steps.

- (1) Relaxation—Completely relax mind and body
- (2) Diaoshen (prepare posture)—Assume correct posture

- (3) Repeat Phrase—Silently repeat a special phrase
- (4) Diaoxi (regulate breath)—Control breathing
- (5) Yishou (hold attention)—Keep attention focused

Each of these steps of Inner Regulation Qigong will be explained in sequence.

(1) Relaxation

One of the keys to success in practicing any Qigong exercise is to know how to fully prepare yourself for an exercise, and another important thing is to know how to keep your mind and body completely relaxed throughout the period of practice. As stated earlier, relaxation involves the two aspects of mind and body, and the body must be put at ease before the mind is able to relax completely. Drink enough water before practice so that you do not have a thirst, and otherwise go to the restroom if necessary before starting. Those wearing a hat or glasses should remove these. Undo all buttons of tight fitting clothing as well as belts and watch bands and shoe strings (remove your shoes where possible). Start relaxing all the muscles in your body progressively from your head to your toes until you are completely relaxed. After relaxing your body completely, you should set aside all other concerns so as to prepare yourself for Qigong practice. Being in a calm and cheerful mood is essential to achieving the proper degree of concentration. Refer to the previous section on Relaxation Qigong for more detail on how to relax mentally and physically.

(2) Diaoshen (prepare posture)

There are four basic positions in Inner Regulation Qigong and they are the side-lying, supine, seated, and reclining positions. These will each be explained individually.

Side-lying position: Lie on your side on the floor or a bed. When lying on a bed, the bed should not be too soft. If the temperature is low, you can place a blanket or light quilt over yourself. Adjust the position of your head with a pillow so that it stays straight and in line with your spine. If anything, your head should be tilted slightly forward toward your chest. Straighten and expand your back and bring your chest just slightly in so that you are able to assume the so-called “contained chest spread back” posture. This is simply an expression for keeping your chest drawn in slightly while keeping your back straight. There is no need to become tense trying to get in this posture. Just straighten your back and keep your chest slightly to the inside in a relaxed and comfortable fashion.

When lying on your right side, your right arm should be bent at the elbow to place your right hand on the pillow about two inches from your face with the palm facing up. Your left arm should be comfortably straight and your left hand should be placed on the side of your hip with the palm down. Your right leg should just be kept comfortable and straight, and your left leg should be bent at the knee at around an 120 degree angle so that one knee is placed on the other and the left foot goes to the back. When lying on your left side, you should assume the same posture but reverse the position of the limbs on the right and left.

After you have assumed a comfortable and stable position, close both of your eyes or leave them just barely open so you can only see one thin streak of light. In

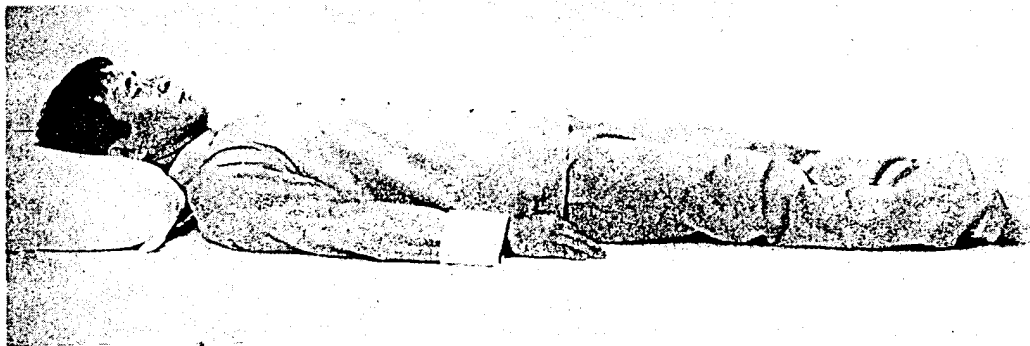
this case, fix your gaze on either your nose or your feet. Close your mouth or leave it open slightly according to the breathing method (Fig. 14).

Fig. 14



Supine position: Lie flat on your back on a bed or on the floor. Draw your chin in just a little and straighten your body out. Your arms should rest at your sides with your palms facing down and fingers comfortably spread out. Your legs should be stretched straight out in a natural manner with your heels together and the toes pointing comfortably outward. Your eyes and your mouth should be the same as in the side-lying position (Fig. 15).

Fig. 15



Seated position (with seat): Sit on a chair or stool with your back straight. Tilt your head slightly forward and assume the “contained chest” posture. Relax your shoulders and let your elbows hang loosely. Place your hands, palms down, on your thighs with the fingers comfortably loose. Place your feet parallel to each other on the floor about shoulder-width apart. Your knees should be bent at a right angle so your thighs are parallel with the floor. When your chair is not high enough for this, place a blanket on the chair to increase the height, and when it is too high,

Fig. 16



place something under your feet to get in the right position. Your eyes and mouth should be the same as in the side-lying position (Fig. 16).

Reclining position: Assume the same reclining position that was explained in the section for Relaxation Qigong (Fig. 17).

The position that is recommended for beginners among the above four positions is either the supine position or the side-lying position. You should choose the lying posture that seems most suitable or comfortable to you, taking into consideration your physical condition. The side-lying position with the right side

Fig. 17



down is the best for those with weak stomachs because this position facilitates the passage of food from the stomach to the intestines. This position is also recommended for times when you practice soon after eating. People with pyloric prolapse, however, should avoid using this position because the pull of gravity on the stomach lining can aggravate the prolapse.

Able bodied people can practice Qigong exclusively in the seated position, and otherwise it can be used from time to time alternating with lying postures. The advantage of this seated position is that it is harder to fall asleep and easier to concentrate. The reclining position is best used in Qigong for relaxing and increasing vitality and is often used at the beginning or at the end of Qigong practice. Those who are bed-ridden can use one of the lying positions, and once they recover, they can switch to the seated position.

(3) Repeat phrase

In order to keep your mind on Diaoxi (regulate breath), the device of repeating a special phrase to yourself is used. You must repeat a special phrase over and over inside your mind. You must not vocalize this phrase. In China people generally start with a phrase with three characters or words. The number of words can be increased according to the effect desired, but people in China are discouraged from having more than nine words in their phrase. It is best for the phrase to be short and to the point. The words used are usually those suggesting relaxation, beauty, and health. Some examples of phrases used in China are as follows;

“I am calm.”

“I sit calmly.”

“I sit calmly and my body is well.”

“I sit calmly and I become healthy.”

“My whole body is relaxed.”

“My mind is at rest and my organs are working.”

“Daily practice builds my health.”

Special phrases like those listed above must be worked in with the Diaoxi, or breath control, which will be explained next. Your breathing must be in perfect synchronization with each repetition of the phrase. For example, when repeating the phrase “I am calm,” the word “I” is imagined while inhaling and “am” is imagined while pausing between the inhalation and exhalation and “calm” is imagined while exhaling. The phrase thereby serves to focus your mind and remove distracting thoughts.

The thing which needs to be emphasized here is that although the words in the special phrase must be distributed evenly during the breathing, they are not meant to change the speed or length of the inhalation, exhalation, or the pause between breaths. There is no set time in which one word must be covered. This is entirely up to each person. The phrase should be kept short and simple to avoid getting it mixed up during practice.

The self-suggestion of these phrases are used to obtain corresponding physiological effects. Therefore, the wording of the special phrase should be tailored to the circumstances of each individual. Those who tend to get nervous and tense should repeat “I am relaxed.” Those with poor digestion should repeat “My mind is at rest and my organs are working.” Those who have a sensation of discomfort or obstruction in their chest should repeat “My energy is concentrated in my lower abdomen.”

Since the phrases listed above were obtained from Chinese texts, they need to be modified somewhat for English speaking people. The phrase “I am calm and relaxed” is a good one for beginners. This phrase will be the one used for explaining the breathing techniques which follow. You can go on to create your own special phrase which has the most meaning for you. Original phrases are just as effective so long as the words are repeated in rhythm with your breathing.

(4) *Diaoxi (regulate breath)*

The breathing techniques in Inner Regulation Qigong are one of the main features of these Qigong exercises, and it is essential that these techniques of diaphragmatic breathing be practiced and mastered. Diaphragmatic breathing simply means to allow your abdomen to expand gradually and fully as you inhale and to let it return to normal as you exhale. The objective here is to obtain distinct expansion and contraction movements in the abdominal wall with each breath. The breathing techniques in Inner Regulation Qigong are a little complicated because the four aspects of breathing, pauses between breaths, tongue movement, and repetition of a special phrase need to be combined. There are actually three breathing techniques that are used in Inner Regulation Qigong, but only the most commonly used techniques of Soft Breathing and Hard Breathing will be explained in this book.

Soft Breathing is suited to those with illnesses or those in poor physical condition as well as those who are beginners at Qigong. This breathing technique is specially beneficial for those who have respiratory ailments or those whose breathing is shallow and irregular. Hard Breathing should be practiced by those of middle age or younger and by those who have no serious illness and are in comparatively good physical condition. This breathing technique has a powerful effect for increasing stamina. *People with high blood pressure must not practice Hard Breathing.* Also it should be noted that the Soft and Hard Breathing Techniques are not to be practiced alternately or in combination with each other. You must decide which technique is most suited to your condition and stick to this technique.

Soft Breathing Technique

Soft Breathing Technique is for those who are beginners to Qigong, those who are in a rather weak condition, and those with respiratory problems. In order to make things simple, just the breathing technique will be presented first, and the special phrase will be combined after this. Always begin with step one (relaxation) and step two (Diaoshen) before beginning the breathing technique. Once you are ready, close your mouth lightly and touch the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth.

Inhale through
the nose.

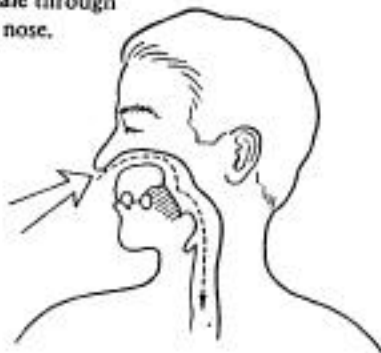


Fig. 18

1. Slowly inhale through your nose and imagine that your breath is being drawn down into your lower abdomen. This is important for the next step of concentrating on "Dantian," the point below the navel. Your lower abdomen should fill out naturally in this process. Be careful not to inhale too deeply or to strain yourself when you do this (Fig. 18).

2. Let your tongue down and open your mouth slightly and exhale slowly. You can exhale through your nose and your mouth simultaneously. Your lower abdomen should go in naturally (Fig. 19).

Fig. 19

Exhale slowly.



Fig. 20

Pause between breaths.



Fig. 21

"I am"

Inhale into lower abdomen.

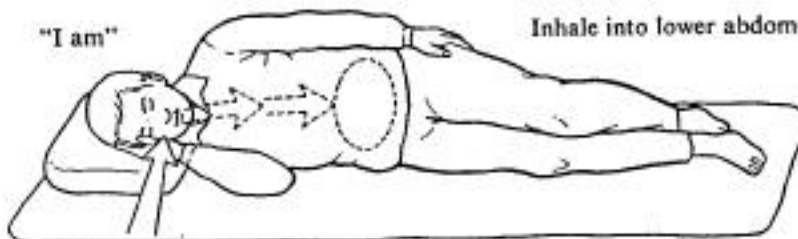


Fig. 22

"calm"

Lower abdomen goes in naturally.

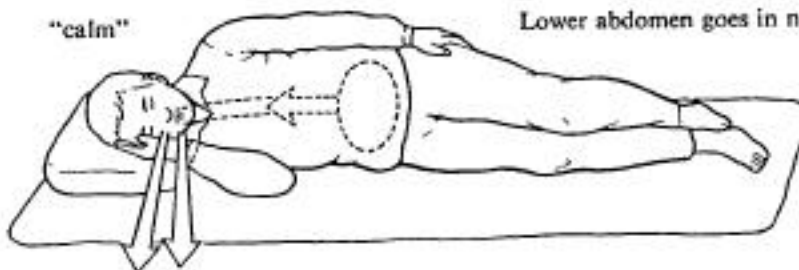
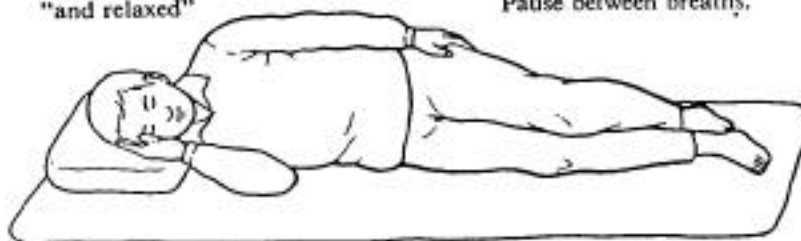


Fig. 23

"and relaxed"

Pause between breaths.



21

3. After exhaling completely, let your breathing pause briefly in a natural way. Leave your tongue down and your mouth slightly open. Your abdomen should also remain slightly collapsed (Fig. 20).

The main points of this breathing technique are to slowly inhale through the nose, exhale through the nose and mouth, and to pause momentarily before inhaling through the nose again. Once you become used to this method of breathing, begin practicing it while repeating your special phrase. Just silently repeat the phrase to yourself in time with your breathing and the movement of your mouth and tongue. This breathing technique is combined with the special phrase as follows:

1. Close your mouth lightly and touch the tip of your tongue on the roof of your mouth and slowly inhale through your nose. While breathing in, feel your breath being drawn down into your lower abdomen and think to yourself "I am" (Fig. 21).
2. Let your tongue down and open your mouth slightly. Exhale slowly and allow your abdomen to go in naturally as you think the word "calm" (Fig. 22).
3. After exhaling completely, let your breathing pause naturally and keep your mouth and tongue as well as your lower abdomen relaxed and in the same position. Think the words "and relaxed" while your breathing is paused momentarily (Fig. 23).

Continue breathing and repeating your special phrase in this way for the duration of your practice period. When finishing this breathing exercise, be sure to end with the closing moves introduced previously with Relaxation Qigong.