

# QIGONG

## FOR WELLBEING



**BASICS FOR  
BEGINNERS**  
WITH SANDRA LEIGH



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# What is Qigong?

Pronounced chee-gong, also spelt chi gong, qi gong, chi kung

Qigong is both a static and dynamic therapeutic exercise practice with its roots in ancient China. Qigong can be considered a practice of presence and movement, a moving meditation. Qigong is one of the eight branches of Classical Oriental Medicine.

Qi (chi) translates to mean life-force energy, and Gong to mean skill. Its sometimes also translated to mean work or cultivate. The literal translation of Qigong being 'energy skill'.

The best way to describe the practice of Qigong is as a gentle and restorative exercise therapy which incorporates a variety of different styles of movements, acupuncture practices, meditation and stillness. The purpose of the practice from a health perspective is to release tension; physical, mental and emotional. When we are able to release stress and tension the energy of the body can circulate freely and without stagnation or blockage.

Qigong activates the flow of energy through our matrix of channels and cells and encourages the innate self- healing capacity of the body.



# Understanding Styles & Forms

## Classical / Traditional

There are literally hundreds, maybe even thousands of different forms of Classical / Traditional Qigong. Classical forms of qigong are generally characterized as a series of precise and differentiated movements performed in a very slow and methodical manner. These forms encompass various elements, such as stretching, balance, strength and body weight bearing movement.

## Modern

Modern Qigong is a little different to its traditional counterpart but just as powerful, it is an integrative approach to the ancient practice. It brings together movements from the hundreds of traditional forms into a more accessible style that complements our modern lifestyles. It allows people to experience the benefits of qigong without the thousands of hours of practice that is often required to master a classical form.

The core of the practice remains, the movements are still precise and differentiated, typically though the practice is performed a little quicker and the format of practice is different. This allows the practice to be undertaken in shorter, more accessible time-frames and blocks, for example a 10 minute self-practice in the morning, 30 minutes when you have a little more space in the day or it could be a 60-75 minute class.

This integrative method brings together movements and postures from various classical forms, those from Classical Qigong and Chinese Health Qigong but also from the hundreds of other traditional styles, as well as Tai Chi and Tao Yin.

Modern Qigong explores acupuncture, standing, slow stretches, gentle flowing movements, breath-work and stillness, and accompanied by a strong focus on presence. Regardless of the method of practice, during Qigong we focus and anchor our attention on the breath, the body and the sensation of Qi; the feeling of aliveness within. We often incorporate other meditative techniques such as mindfulness, intention and visualisation.

When practicing Qigong our intention is to be embodied and present, to connect with ourselves in a holistic way, what is described in Chinese philosophy as connecting The Three Treasures. There are several fundamental principals in the practice of this beautiful form of self-care and restoration, the essence being to slow down, soften the heart and to do less.

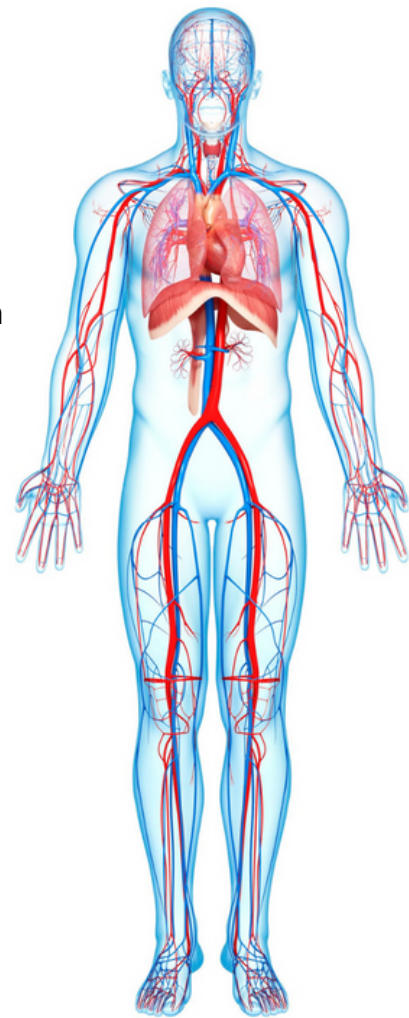


# Health Benefits

Regular Qigong practice can provide a range of health benefits:

## Physical:

- ◆ Increase heart and lung function
- ◆ Positive effect on bone health and density
- ◆ Improve balance and increased strength and flexibility
- ◆ Improve digestion and positively impacts nutritive function
- ◆ Regulate blood pressure
- ◆ Reduce stress through lowering cortisol in the blood – even through short term practice
- ◆ Increase immune function
- ◆ Reduce inflammation and increases wound healing ability
- ◆ Improve the function of the lymphatic system
- ◆ Reduce impacts of sickness



## Mental & emotional benefits:

- ◆ Decrease anxiety and improve feelings of depression
- ◆ Improve general measures of mood
- ◆ Improve emotional regulation and resiliency
- ◆ Improve concentration and focus
- ◆ Increase energy, productivity and creativity
- ◆ Increase self efficacy and self esteem
- ◆ Increase ability to manage and relieve stress
- ◆ Improve sleep quality

# Qi and the Meridian network

Qi is our life force energy. It flows throughout our bodies through channels referred to as meridians, there are 12 primary energy meridians and 8 extraordinary meridians, these are connected by over 700 energy points, known as acu-points.

When we practice Qigong we cultivate our life force energy and help it to circulate freely throughout our body. The various practices of Qigong help to stimulate the fascia, tendons, ligaments and muscles of the body which encourages the flow of Qi.

Qi is described as a free-flowing, colourless, non-cellular liquid. One way to conceptualise Qi is to imagine that if one cell produces a tiny bit of energy as a byproduct of living, then trillions of cells will produce a field of energy. Like all phenomena in nature this energy will want to flow. Just as water will flow down a river along the path of least resistance, similarly in the body, the pathways for energy flow will occur along the path of least resistance.

The meridian system has been measured and mapped by modern technological methods, electronically, thematically, and radio-actively, with practice the meridians can also be felt. Each meridian links up to another and is connected to organs in the body, forming a matrix of energy. Each meridian has specific functions and have a direct influence on the functioning of the organs and glands. If any of the meridians become stagnant or blocked, it can have a negative impact on the functioning of the body and therefore the state of health.

The acu-points along the meridians are electro-magnetic in character and consist of small, oval cells called Bonham corpuscles, which surround the capillaries in the skin, the blood vessels, and the organs throughout the body. There are around 500 points which are used most frequently, in acupuncture they are stimulated in sequences, depending on the desired action.

# Oriental Medicine Basics

## Yin | Yang

Yin and Yang describes something very basic which is also incredibly complex, it describes the dynamic balance of the whole universe. It refers to opposed yet complementary energies- everything contains both Yin and Yang.

Although they are totally different they are interdependent, they cannot exist without each other and they are never separate - two parts which form a whole, like two sides of a coin. One simple way to think about Yin- Yang is the breath. You can't only breathe in or only breathe out.

Nothing is absolute with Yin and Yang. The designation of something as Yin or Yang is always relative to some other thing. The small dots within each of the two energies (represented by black and white) symbolize that there is always some Yin (black) within Yang (white) and vice versa. Day and night can help us to understand, this concept. For example, day is yang, yet within every day there is both a yang part— the early morning, and a yin part—late day, as it begins to turn to night.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine all the internal organs of the body as well as the meridians have a specific balance of yin and yang and through the different movements of qigong we are able to balance the energy and the yin and yang aspects within the body. When there are imbalances of yin or yang this manifests as disease and illness in the body.



# Practice Basics

## Principles:

There are several fundamental elements in Qigong practice. The most important being:

**Doing less - practicing in a non striving, accepting and heart-centred manner**

## Additionally:

### Body

Sensing into the physical body and softening the body.

### Mind

Drawing attention inward, practicing presence. Allow focus to be continually drawn back to the body, breath, Qi and the present moment.

### Breath

Natural, correctly and in connection with the Dantian.

### Posture

One of the physical health benefits that comes through regular Qigong practice is optimal posture and the gradual correction of postural misalignment. This occurs naturally over a period of time through correcting the position of the body during practice as well as through body awareness and conscious standing and movement.

There are several standing postures utilised in Qigong practice and an entire form of Traditional Qigong dedicated to standing and posture.



Standing incorporates the essential elements of qigong, such as posture, relaxation and breath-work, as well as developing body alignment, balance, strength and awareness.

## Breathing

Many people of the course of their lifetimes have developed abnormal or unusual patterns and habits of breathing. Healthy respiration is an important aspect of wellbeing and there are some amazing health outcomes that can be achieved just through retraining breathing and respiration into a natural pattern that utilises the diaphragm.

*There is an ancient Chinese saying...  
The nose is for breathing... the mouth is for eating!*

During the practice of Qigong there are various types of breathing techniques. Most commonly we breathe in and out through the nose, in a natural way. We sometimes utilise other breathing techniques that assist in releasing tension and Qi from the body.

## Song

Fear not... we're not about to burst into vocal musicality! Song (pronounced sung) in Chinese refers to a softening and loosening of the body. Its not just relaxation in the English sense of the word, it implies a whole softening, a softness of the heart, a releasing of effort-ing, adopting an awareness and tranquility, sensitivity, warmth and grounded-ness.

Often when we practice Qigong we allow a small smile to come onto the corners of the mouth, directed inwardly at ourselves... we embrace ourselves as if we were a good friend; with kindness, gentleness and unconditional friendly-ness.

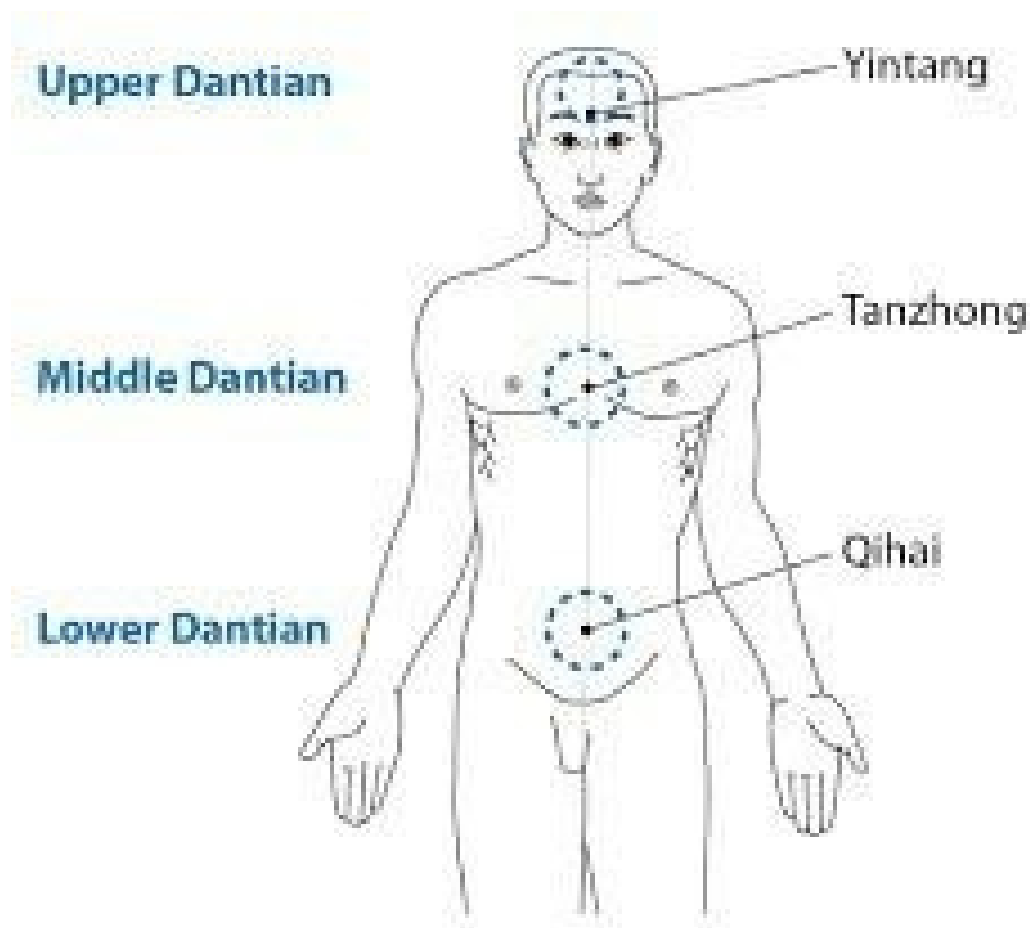
*"To the mind that is still, the whole universe surrenders."*

Lao Tzu

## Dantian

The three Dantian (or Tan Tien), refer to three energy reservoirs in the body; the lower, middle and upper energy centres. The Dantian are somewhat similar to chakras; in simplistic terms the chakras can be considered portals which energy flows through and the Dantian are places where energy collects and resides. The Lower Dantian is located two inches below the navel in the centre of the body.

The word Dantian translates to mean 'elixir field'. Biophysics research shows that three energy centres have been identified in the body and they correspond with the locations of the three Dantian.



*Image credit: Chen Taijiquan*

*“Silence is the great source of strength.”*

Lao Tzu

# Practice Fundamentals

## Breath-work

As mentioned above a soft, natural approach to breathing is typical in a classical qigong practice. In fact, interestingly, in competitive Tai Chi participants would be graded poorly if their breathing was visible!

When we talk about natural breathing it should be noted that this means diaphragmatic breathing, breathing in and out, through the nose in a way that engages the diaphragm. This doesn't necessarily mean taking deep breaths, it's more about the activation of the diaphragm and breathing towards the Dantian.

Due to the range of breathing dysfunction that affects our people in our modern culture, we often adopt synchronised breathing during the practice of Modern Qigong, guiding students to breathe in, and then out with various facets of each movement. This is often adopted in the initial stages of practice and particularly with new students. As a student becomes more proficient and comfortable we revert to encouraging natural breathing. Synchronising the breathing can also assist students with the coordination aspects of the practice.

**There are some other forms of breath-work that are utilised during Qigong practice, these are:**

**Cleansing breath** - breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth. The exhale begins through the nose and continues out through the mouth with an audible exhale (sigh).

**Cooling breath** - breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth while making an 'O' shape with the mouth and lips. Blowing the air over the tongue during the exhale.

**Fanning the fire** - a series of short in- and out-breaths through the nose, moving the abdomen back towards the spine on each audible exhale. Focus on the exhale, the inhale with occur naturally.

## Standing form

There are various standing postures utilised in Qigong practice, there is in fact an entire Classical form of Qigong devoted to standing practice; called Zhan Zhuang. Pronounced 'Jan Jong' the translation is 'standing like a stake' or 'standing like a tree'.

Standing form incorporates the essential elements of qigong, such as posture, relaxation and breath-work, as well as developing body alignment, balance, strength and awareness. While in standing meditation/ posture externally there is no movement, yet internally the Qi and the breath are moving. It is both passive and active, both yin and yang.

In ancient cultures standing postures were used to induce altered states of consciousness and psychophysiology. It is said that in standing we learn how to move energetic obstructions and achieving a balanced flow of Qi.

Practice of dynamic Qigong always begins from the practice of static qigong - or standing form. There are various standing forms that we utilise in Qigong:

- Qigong Standing Form (basic stance)
- Bamboo in the wind (feet together)
- Horse Form (wide stance)
- Split Form (split stance x2)

*“When the student is ready the teacher appears.”*

Tao Te Ching

Below is a detailed diagram that focuses on the Qigong Standing Form. The principles of this posture are adopted through the alternative standing positions also. The fundamentals of this standing position are:

- Feet hip width apart or a little wider
- Toes and heels parallel (if possible)
- Hips heavy - tail bone gently directed toward the earth
- Knees soft - slightly bent
- Broaden across the chest and upper back
- Spaciousness through side-body and armpits - elbows slightly away from the torso
- Crown lifted



*Image credit: ResearchGate*

# Guidelines & Precautions

## Mode for practice

Most Qigong systems and practices are gentle and meditative, Qigong is considered one of the safest wellbeing modalities to practice. Practice in moderation, with patience and a mindset of 'doing less' and 'softening the body, heart and mind'.

The most common negative side effects are headache, nausea, feelings of weakness or queasiness, these can occur through excessive concentration or distraction or through forced breathing.

On a handful of occasions students have found that practicing on a completely empty stomach to cause feelings of nausea, although it is not recommended to practice on a full stomach either.

## Environment for practice

Do not practice in wind - it disperses Qi Don't practice in situations and environments in which you'll be interrupted or have other things competing for your attention.

Choose the Qigong style and form of practice that is appropriate for the conditions.

## Medical issues and practice

It is recommended that any person commencing a practice of Qigong that has pre-existing medical conditions seek the advice of their medical professional prior to commencing practice.

## General cautions

- Pregnant and menstruating women should avoid deep and strenuous postures.
- Do not practice postures that may strain arthritic or damaged joints.
- In the presence of an infection or inflammation a students should not practice a form or style that creates additional heat (yang).
- Do not overexert energy reserves to practice - if tired/fatigued choose rest.

By attending this workshop or practising Qigong online with Sandra Leigh Training, you agree to the terms and conditions at

<https://sandraleightraining.com.au/risk-waiver/>

*credits: Nicole Lee Qigong Level 1 Teacher training*

*"When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be."*

Tao Tzu

Dear Reader,

Thank you for your interest in Qigong. This beautiful flowing practise has a very deep, special place in my heart and I am humbled to share it with you. I had the opportunity and spent some time learning and practising Qigong over one of the most stressful times of my life, the Covid period.

This inspired me to move into teacher training. It has given me hope that in my present and future I can dive even deeper within myself to find another level of peace and well- being.

Qigong helps me ground physically, emotionally and mentally, like nothing else has before. It has helped me find a deeper meaning in mindful movement that is the perfect blend with my Pilates practice and I am excited to share this with you.

I share this passion with you from my inner knowing and knowledge of how mindful movement heals, calms, brings strength and empowerment to those who are open to accepting it.

Much Love

*Sandra Leigh*





# ABOUT YOUR TRAINER

Sandra's qualifications are varied, she has a vast background in small business management, customer service, retail, sales, personal and business coaching, professional body work and has undertaken the following trainings and certifications:

- Master Practitioner of NLP (Neuro-Linguistics Programming)
- Master Results Acceleration Coach Performance Consultant Trainer of NLP Presentation & Platform Skills
- Master Ericksonian Hypnosis
- Advanced Subconscious Reprogramming Certificate IV in Small Business Management
- Certificate III in Education Support (Teachers Aide)
- Certificate IV in TAE Training and Education Diploma in Professional Pilates
- Intermediate Pilates Certificate
- Pilates Reformer Certificate
- Pilates Post & Pre-natal Training
- Pilates Small Apparatus Training
- Pilate's Injury Rehabilitation Training
- Level 1 Qi Gong Health Foundations

*“A body free from nervous tension and fatigue is the ideal shelter provided by nature for housing a well-balanced mind, fully capable of successfully meeting all the complex problems of modern living.”*

Joseph Pilates

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