

ChiBall Tai Chi-Qi Gong



The Wood Element

- Rising Yang -

Characteristics of the Wood Element

Energetic

rising - awakening - new growth - new developments - renewal

Physical

flexibility of joints, muscle, ligaments - muscular strength and control - adaptability - eyesight

Emotional

frustration - impatience - anger - aggression - control - rigid attitudes

Mind

flexibility in our thinking - ability to make plans and decisions - develop new ideas - be organised

The Wood Element - Tai Chi- Qi Gong

Within the ChiBall programme, TaiChi Qi Gong represents the wood element, the Springtime of year; a time of rising, awakening energy. The corresponding partner organs are the liver and gallbladder. The emotional and physical theme is patience, humour and flexibility.

Tai Chi-Qi Gong is an integration of Qi Gong and Tai Chi based exercises that are focused primarily on cultivating a healthy body and mind. Qi Gong is said to be the art of cultivating energy and Tai Chi is the art of managing it. ChiBall incorporates the essence of both Tai Chi and Qi Gong and aims to honour the ancestral path of both disciplines by incorporating the same foundations for movement and practise.

Qi Gong

Qi Gong literally means “energy exercises” or “energy cultivation through exercise” and is often referred to as “the healing art of Qi Gong”. Healing Qi Gong practise is a combination of movement, meditation, breathing, and discipline to foster a healthy mind, body and spirit. The purpose of Qi Gong is to reinforce physical power and through dedicated practise endeavours to establish harmony between heaven, earth and humanity. Within the philosophy of Qi Gong is the concept of the Three Treasures – Energy, Essence and Spirit. Energy is chi (Qi) – the universal life force, essence is the existence of all that is, and spirit encompasses mind and awareness. The traditional Chinese masters created a five step strategy to strengthen and regulate the Three Treasures and promote optimal health and longevity called the “Five Regulations”.

1. Regulate the Body

The body is regulated through achieving a deep state of physical relaxation and performing a series of movements that relax, stretch, strengthen and energise, stimulate circulation, open the energy channels (meridians) and massage internal organs.

2. Regulate the Breath

The breath provides the bridge between your physical self, your nervous system and your consciousness or ‘mind’. The synchronisation of the body and breath during movement facilitates the flow of energy (chi) throughout the body and internal organs. The long, slow, soft and smooth Qi Gong breathing promotes soften, relaxing and the ability to go deeper into the movement

3. Regulate the Mind

When the mind is still and calm we can feel and direct qi with intent. This is achieved by fully engaging, focusing on form, posture, movement, breathing, rhythm and allowing no opportunity for distraction from the practise.

4. Regulate the Chi

Having achieved the first three regulations the body, breath and mind, a calm, peaceful, empty and light state is attained and the ability to sense and lead Chi to physical blockages or stagnation’s intensifies. In this state we become the commander and director of our lives, and energy flows easily and effortlessly.

5. Regulate the Spirit

The fifth element of Qi Gong training is called ‘Tiao Shen’. It is the ultimate goal and gateway to enlightenment, all knowing awareness, becoming one with the Tao and returning to the source.



Tai Chi

Tai Chi, as it is practiced in the west today, incorporates a number of so-called forms (sometimes also called 'sets') which consist of a sequence of movements. Many of these movements originate from the martial arts which were based on the natural movements of animals and birds. These movements are performed slowly, softly and gracefully with smooth and even transitions between them.

Tai Chi practise in most of the Western world today is used as meditative exercise for the body for stress relief, and to balance and calm the mind and body.

One of the avowed aims of Tai Chi is to cultivate the circulation of 'chi' within the body and to foster a calm and tranquil mind by focusing on the precise execution of each exercise. Optimal balance, alignment, refined motor control, rhythm of movement, the origin of movement from the body's centre focuses the mind and gradually leads the practitioner into a moving meditative and almost trance state. Physically the practice of Tai Chi can correct poor postural alignment, movement patterns, improve mobility, flexibility, agility and strength.

ChiBall Tai Chi-Qi Gong

The purpose of ChiBall Tai Chi-Qi Gong at the beginning of every ChiBall class is to establish posture, ground and centre the body, calm the mind, awaken and stimulate chi and to bring a flow and relaxation through movements. The foundation ChiBall Tai Chi exercises have been inspired by movements from the Tai Chi 24 yang form and the Qi Gong 'Eight Precious Exercises'.

The ancient wisdom of Tai Chi and Qi Gong teaches us about yin and yang in action and how depleted chi can be replenished within the body. We also learn to appreciate that the slower we move the more we feel and the more we learn about ourselves.

The Essence of Qi Gong

Qi Gong (Chi Kung) brings a more in-depth focus on the meridian system and the inner organs. In order to add depth to your teaching practise, consider the following:

- Knowledge of all the inner organs and where they are in the body. Use breathing and visualisation to send energy to each organ.
- Knowledge of all the meridians and their pathways through the body. Use breathing and movement to tone and stretch each meridian
- Become intimately acquainted with the breath. Expand the breath within each movement, improving lung capacity and concentration. Keep the breath long, slow, soft and smooth.

Breathing for Qi Gong practise

During physical exercise it is most common to synchronise the breathing with movement of the body. In Qi Gong practise breathing is also synchronised with the movement of energy. This is achieved through single minded concentration of the mind on breath and movement which is essential so that both aspects remain flowing and connected. As soon as the mind is distracted by internal chatter, the breath falters, scattering and dissipating the energy.

Visualisation and mindful intention during practise of energy being drawn in and along the meridians or internal organs is said to have a resounding affect on healing inner organs, moving stagnant chi and generally rejuvenating the body's internal chi. Being able to recall clear images of how inner organs look and where they are housed inside the body increases the intensity and ability to heal internal disharmonies.

Basic Stance

- The foundation for all Qi Gong practise incorporates two positions called "Wu Chi Stance" and "Horse Riding Stance". Wu Chi Stance is the foundation for all Qi Gong exercises.
- In Wu Chi the feet are placed shoulder width apart to create a firm and stable framework for the exercises. Horse Riding Stance is a deeper squatting position with the feet wider than shoulder width.
- For easy adjustment and balance during practise, it is important to lower the pelvic centre and extend the dantien downward towards the earth by slightly bending the knees as if sitting on a bar stool that has been placed about 5cms (2") below the buttocks.

- The spine is elongated by extending the tail bone down towards the earth at a 30 degree angle and the occipital protuberance skull bone extending upwards at a 30 degree angle to the sky or heavens. The crown of the head is in alignment with the navel and the midpoint on the ground between the feet. The posture is vertically aligned between the crown of head(baihui), pelvis(huiyin), and front of the ankle (jeixi) feet.
- The crown of the head extends up and away from the ground and navel. The head is considered to represent 'heaven' and the pelvis and feet the 'earth'.
- The Wu Chi promotes energy flow between these two points. Wu Chi is considered to be a most important and essential posture in the practise of Qi Gong and all Chinese martial arts.

Posture

The main components of posture for the practise of Qi Gong exercises are:

Feet

The feet are shoulder width apart and in classical training, are parallel. Correct alignment of the feet is considered to be essential for successful execution of postures whether practicing Tai Chi, Qi Gong or Yoga. Too much time spent in fashionable shoes (including athletic training shoes) can weaken foot musculature. Strong feet keep us firmly connected to the ground. The saying "they have both feet firmly planted into the ground" describes someone who is self directed, determined and a good perspective on life. A sense of groundedness or connection with the earth according to Yoga and Qi Gong philosophy, keeps the mind and emotions calm and stable. Once we lose the firm, stable foundation of our feet we begin losing strength and independence in life. Weakness in the feet causes weaknesses in the ankles, shins, knees, hips, pelvis, lower, mid then upper spine, neck and head. According to these philosophies, agility and energy into our more senior years is reliant on strong, flexible feet.

Knees

When practising Qi Gong exercises for the first time, it is important not to bend the knees too deeply, particularly if there is a history of knee problems. In classical Qi Gong the toes are usually parallel. To reduce discomfort in the knees, turn the toes out slightly and press the knees (without force) towards the little toe side of the feet. This recruits strength and energy from the thigh muscles to support the knees and promotes overall stability of the upper leg.

Pelvis & Spine

The pelvis is relaxed as if suspended between two poles - the hip joints. A slight drop of the tail bone downward and bending of the knees, transfers the body weight onto the thighs which frees the lower back and hips. The spine then feels light, secure and supported in the Wu Chi stance.

Abdomen

Abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing is practised in both Tai Chi and Qi Gong. The abdomen swells or distends during inhalation and flattens or is compressed during exhalation. Good abdominal tone is essential for healthy diaphragmatic action when expelling air and gases from the body via the lungs. Strengthening the abdominal muscles greatly enhances our breathing.

Chest & Shoulders

Concentration on the heart area allows the chest to open and expand naturally. Visualising the heart lifting during practise draws the thoracic spine (middle back area) into the centre of the body, frees the diaphragm for breathing and contributes to overall awareness of spinal alignment. When attention is placed on lifting the heart area, the shoulders will usually relax and find their natural alignment. However slightly rounding the shoulders (without collapsing or hollowing the chest) broadens and softens the middle of the back, reducing the risk of tension being held there.

Head, Neck & Chin

The head is balanced and held as if being lifted away from the shoulders. A neck which is long with the chin drawn in very slightly, aids neck alignment and ensures softness and relaxation of the throat muscles. Tension in the neck or throat impedes energy flow to the head, therefore being mindful of how the head is being held when changing direction is of the utmost importance during Qi Gong. Checking the position of the chin throughout practise promotes continued alignment of the cervical spine. The chin should be slightly tucked in so that the area below the occipital bone (rear base of skull) remains open and free.



Arms, Elbows & Hands

Opening or hollowing the armpits opens the heart channel. The inner elbow joint should be turned in towards the body, with the palms relaxed, hollowed, facing backwards, fingers slightly curled. The Lao-gung points in the centre of the palms are considered to be the most powerful points in the body from which energy can be transmitted. Keeping all the joints of the body soft allows chi to travel unimpeded along the meridian channels.

Face

Eyes

The gaze from the eyes is soft. Focus on a point on the horizon or on the ground about six feet ahead (two metres) and allow everything around that point to go slightly out of focus. Relax all the tiny little muscles behind the eyes and allow the eyeballs to drop deeper into the eye socket.

Mouth

Relax the jaw and the root of the tongue, and allow the throat to soften. The teeth may touch, but be aware of clamping or clenching of the jaw.

Tongue

Placing the tip of the tongue on the roof of the mouth just behind the top teeth creates a closed circuit of energy by connecting the two central channels in the body - the governing and conception vessels. When practising Tai Chi, Qi Gong it is important to keep the tongue gently connected to the roof of the mouth so that internal chi can be concentrated and then transported throughout the internal body.

Awareness of Chi

As chi energy is increased and begins to move through the systems, various sensations are experienced, from tingling, trembling, sweating, heat or cold. These sensations can occur in the extremities, abdomen, spine or the body as a whole. These physical experiences can be a combination of muscular responses to the exercises as well as indications of chi opening up the energy system to move freely throughout the meridian system and inner organs. As the body is nourished with breathing, movement, and internal chi, circulation of both blood and chi improves, aiding elimination of toxic substances and bacteria which can cause degeneration and disease in the body. Burping, coughing and flatulence during practise are indications of internal imbalances in the stomach, liver and digestive systems. With regular practise the system becomes healthier and these symptoms begin to subside. As with any other exercise discipline, warming up and cooling down exercises prevent muscle soreness. Gentle moving stretches before and after practise, prepares and then settles the body and chi.

Additional Notes

When practising TaiChi Qi Gong, movements always start to the left. The directional aspects within the practice pre supposes the practitioner starts facing South, therefore the movements start to the east following the rising of the sun.

Qi Gong Exercises

Opening position (Wu Chi)

Meridian/Organs Activated	Benefits	ChiBall Qi Gong Exercise
All Yin (front) and Yang (back) Meridians and organs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Forms the basis of all movements 	

Teaching Opening Position

- Stand with feet shoulder width apart
- Arms hang down
- Palms face the thighs
- Relax to whole body
- Knees slightly bent
- Clear the mind
- Ball in the R hand

Remain in this position for several minutes.



The Essence of Tai Chi

The healing art of Qi Gong is best learned first before commencing a serious practise of Tai Chi. Qi Gong teaches the foundations of standing, breathing, mindfulness and the concept of Chi. Although Tai Chi uses a similar model to Qi Gong, the motivation in the Western world is on learning the set of movements. Often the essential foundation for correct stance and posture, chi, yin and yang are overlooked or just not taught. Hence the recommendation to have a sound Qi Gong practise before embarking on other traditional martial art based disciplines.

There are five ways of moving chi in exercise

Up & Down

Movements which lift and movements which descend.

Forward & Retreating

Moving the body forward from one foot to the other on the exhalation using the inhalation whilst retreating.

Sideways

Moving or travelling laterally.

Away from the axis

Arm and leg movements which extend outwards away from the mid line of the body.

Towards the axis

Arm and leg movements which pull inward or move towards the mid line of the body.

Principles of Tai Chi Practice

Chi

Mindfully feel the body draw Chi (energy) into the dantien through:

- The soles of the feet.
- Palms of the hands.
- Crown of the head.

Mindfully feel the body being charged with Chi by focusing on key areas:

- Warm hands, feet and face.
- Tingling fingers.
- Warmth in the hands and feet and general warmth throughout the body. When the core body temperature has risen this is evidence that Chi is circulating throughout the body.
- Stance, Posture & Form

Ground the body with visualizations:

- Feel the whole foot spread across the floor.
- Imagine roots growing out of the soles of the feet into the ground.
- Keep the knees soft. Chi cannot travel through locked joints.

The spine is straight

- The shoulders remain over the pelvis or dantien.
- The pelvis and dantien are centred between the heel and the centre of the foot.
- Move the dantien in the required direction and the body follows in one complete unit.
- Chi travels along the spine effortlessly when it is straight. Chi becomes stuck when the shoulders are collapsed and the spine is rounded.

Keep a 60/40 pressure when transferring weight from one leg to the other:

- As you lean across from one foot to the other make sure the weight bearing leg is carrying 60% of the body weight and the unloading leg retains 40% of the body weight.
- The legs will be working hard effortlessly.
- You will remain centred.

**Make all movements as relaxed as you possibly can:**

The mind cannot wander if you keep your attention on the body.

Every time you move bring your attention to a certain body part and one by one mindfully release tension from that area

- feet
- knees
- buttocks
- lower back
- ribs
- arms
- shoulders
- neck

Final tips for correct practise

- In Tai Chi we always correct from the feet upwards
- Maintain your "Tai Chi square" foot placement when turning and stepping. This means at all times keeping the feet hip width apart allowing the toes of the back foot to turn out at 45 degrees.
- Move from the navel when you change direction.
- Avoid crossing the mid-line of the body when extending your arm.
- Synchronize the knees/elbows, ankles/wrists when moving.
- Let the breath dictate the movement.

Principles of Tai Chi Breathing

The breathing comes from the dantien. Begin by placing both hands just below the navel with the fingers pointing towards the mid line of the body and finger-tips touching:

- Breathe in and feel the abdomen swell and the hands move apart.
- Breathe out and feel the abdomen shrink and hands move towards each other.
- Feel the back expand into the kidney area. Then feel the ribcage expand sideways. Finally feel the whole torso expanding and contracting like a large cylinder.
- Try to make the exhalation slightly longer than the inhalation to avoid hyperventilation (Please note: hyperventilation is common when breathing exercises are first introduced. It is important to fully exhale and allow the inhalation be a natural response rather than a grabbing one)
- Tai Chi movement should follow the breath. The breath should never chase the movement. The breath is primary, the movement secondary. Breathing in and out through the nose cleanses and rejuvenates the brain and is used as the standard method when performing the slow movements.. Breathing in through the nose and out through the mouth cleanses the blood and releases toxins from the internal organs and is sometimes used in faster and more fighting forms.

Tai Chi Exercises

Wave Arms

Meridian/Organs Activated	Benefits	ChiBall Tai Chi Exercise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All Yin (front) and Yang (back) meridians and organs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Balances yin and yang energies Brings harmony to the emotions and clarity to the mind Calms and regulates the breath Good for developing synchronization of the movement and breath Relaxes arms, shoulders and entire body Builds strength in thighs, knees, ankles Improves circulation and stimulates entire body Excellent for alleviating arthritis Sedates rising liver chi 	

Teaching Wave Arms:

- Inhale: float the arms upwards in front of the body leading with the back of the hands with palms down as if tracing the shape of a very large ChiBall. Draw the shoulder blades down to bring the hands slightly in towards the chest as you straighten the knees.
- Exhale: lower the arms down in front as you bend the knees
- Alternate the ChiBall between left and right hand by passing the ball behind the back



Butterfly Arms

Meridian/Organs Activated	Benefits	ChiBall Tai Chi Exercise
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lungs Large Intestine Pericardium 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gently stimulates breathing and relaxes neck, shoulders and upper back. 	

Teaching Butterfly:

- Stand in wu chi stance with the ChiBall at the lower dantien.
- Inhale: take the ChiBall in your left hand and float arms out to the side keeping your wrists and elbows soft. As you raise the arms make sure the tips of the shoulders stay down and that the elbows remain below the shoulders.
- Exhale: soften the elbows and float the arms down swapping the chiball into the other hand
- Repeat on the other side

Circle the Sun

Meridian/Organs Activated	Benefits	ChiBall Tai Chi Exercise
Meridians <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gallbladder Heart Small Intestine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expands and stretches waist and ribcage. Releases stiffness and tension from shoulders and upper back. Diaphragm is stretched and exercised which helps improve breathing. 	

Teaching Circle the Sun:

- Stand in wu chi stance and hold the ChiBall in both hands just below the heart area.
- Inhale: place the ChiBall in the left hand and circle the arm across the body towards the right shoulder, rotating the palm upwards above and behind the head.
- Exhale: complete the circle and finish at the lower dantien
- The opposite hand without the ball presses the earth and stabilizes the movement

Push the Wind

Meridian/Organs Activated	Benefits	ChiBall Tai Chi Exercise
Meridians <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gallbladder Large Intestine Small Intestine Tripple Heater Organs <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Liver Stomach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Releases tension in the upper back and shoulders. Stimulates spinal nerves, strengthens spinal muscles. Increases blood flow to the brain. Massages liver and stomach and aids digestion. Boosts the immune system 	

Teaching Push the Wind

- Stand in wu chi stance with the ChiBall at the chest. Inhale to prepare
- Exhale: with the ChiBall in the left hand bring the ChiBall to the left shoulder and extend the arm forward keeping the elbow sort and the shoulder back. At the same time pressing the right palm down towards the floor keeping soft at the elbow
- Inhale: rotate the left palm upwards to draw the ChiBall back at the same time bringing the right hand back into place on the top of the ball

Circle the Moon

Meridian/Organs Activated	Benefits	ChiBall Tai Chi Exercise
Meridians <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gallbladder Heart Small Intestine Lung Large Intestine 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Opens and expands chest and improves breathing. Releases stiffness and tension in the shoulders, upper back, ribcage, waist. 	

Teaching Circle the Moon

- Stand in wu chi stance width and hold the ChiBall in both hands at the lower dantien.
- Inhale: place the ChiBall in the left hand with the palm upwards keeping the elbow soft, draw the ChiBall around behind the back allowing your hips to follow the movement of the ChiBall
- Exhale: as the ChiBall comes round to your right shoulder as you rotate the left palm downwards to complete the circle bringing the ChiBall down to the lower dantien
- Repeat circling out to the right side.
- This exercise gives a deep massage to the hips and lower back