

Gong ho!

Sure, it's ancient (and hard to pronounce) but Qi Gong packs a powerful punch

Two hundred million Chinese people practise Qi Gong every day to lose weight, boost energy and maintain health. We think they could be onto something. Pronounced "chi goong", this ancient art is part exercise routine, part stress buster.

THE PHILOSOPHY

Qi is the Chinese name for life energy in the body. Gong refers to work (or exercise) – the practice for enhancing our Qi. According to Aussie Qi Gong instructor Angela Zhu, traditional Chinese medicine is based on the belief that illness is caused by disturbances to Qi. "This could mean too much in one area or not enough," she says. "By restoring the natural balance of Qi, the likelihood of disease is reduced." The movements in Qi Gong, combined with a slow breathing and visualisation, bumps this up from a fitness program to the realm of holistic health.

WHAT THE DOCS SAY

Studies have found Qi Gong reduces the body's dopamine levels, triggering a relaxation response, says Dr David Eisenberg from the

Harvard Faculty of Medicine, US. And a study by the Shanghai Institute of Hypertension in China found people who practise Qi Gong daily reduce their incidence of stroke by up to 50 per cent. University of Queensland research suggests that Qi Gong helps prevent diabetes by creating greater uptake and use of glucose, and it can help slim your waistline, too. "One of the most important results of the study was the significant reduction in waist circumference," says lead author Liu Xin. Oprah's favourite medical guru Dr Oz has long been touting its health benefits, too. When asked to recommend one practice for people to do every day, he said: "If you want to be healthy and live to 100, do Qi Gong." Need more? Zhu adds: "Whether you want to lose weight, improve your health or restore balance to your life, Qi Gong is great. It's easy to learn, can be practised at home and easily fits into a hectic schedule. Your body is opened up from the core and your organs and core muscles are lifted up, providing better posture and tighter stomach muscles." To top it off, Zhu says that Qi Gong can help your worries melt away, too.

High
Qi



MAX YOUR MOJO

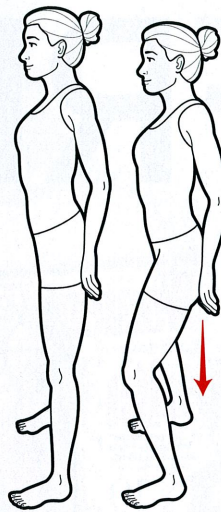
DoSun (a form of Qi Gong that literally means "do as the sun does") is slow, graceful and mindful. It focuses on breathing, flexibility, muscle strength and balance. You should feel like you are stretching all parts of your body from the inside out. Try these four poses from instructor Zhu.

1

SUNRISE - SUNSET

STRENGTHENS core muscles
REDUCES stress
IMPROVES posture

- > Engage pelvic floor muscles and core to stretch your spine to the crown of your head. Imagine your crown lifting towards the sky.
- > While tightening your stomach, lift your shoulders up and back.
- > Squeeze together shoulder blades, keeping torso stretched up and shoulders down.
- > Gently bend your knees and sink your tailbone down slightly. Hold this pose for 10 seconds or until you feel a good stretch.
- > Repeat several times.

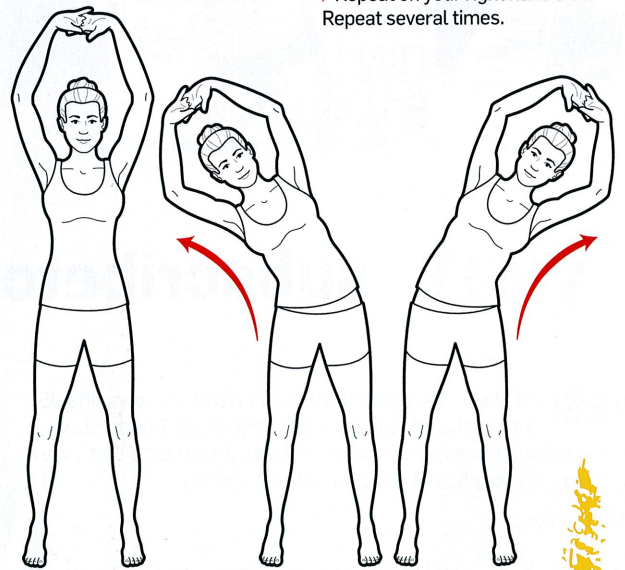


2

THE SUN AND THE MOON

STRENGTHENS stomach muscles
IMPROVES circulation

- > Lock your fingers in front of your lower stomach, palms facing away from your body.
- > Bring your hands up above your head and stretch your torso up.
- > Slowly bend from your hips to the left, squeezing the left side of your waist and stretching the right hand side of your body. Picture energy flowing through your body from your feet to the tips of your fingers. Hold for 15 seconds.
- > Repeat on your right hand side. Repeat several times.

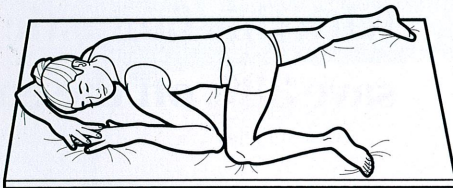


4

LIZARD IN THE SUN

STRENGTHENS leg and back muscles
IMPROVES flexibility

- > Lie on your stomach and put your hands together above your head, bending your arms at the elbows.
- > Keeping the lower half of your body still, move your arms and upper body together to the left, squeezing the left side of your waist while stretching the right side.
- > Bend your left knee to touch your left elbow.
- > Repeat on the other side, then repeat the process several more times.

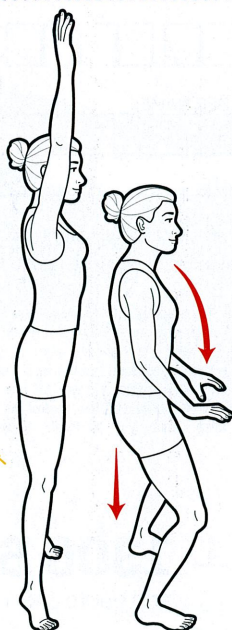


3

AWAKENING OF ENERGY

IMPROVES flexibility and balance

- > Stand with your hands beside legs.
- > Breathe in from your stomach; slowly lift arms until they're beside your ears.
- > Keeping your core firm, slowly lift your heels and balance for 15 seconds.
- > Breathe out from stomach; slowly lower arms and heels to starting position.
- > Sink your tailbone down slightly.
- > Repeat movement slowly, several more times.



Quick tip

Instructor Zhu recommends practising Qi Gong on an empty stomach, before meals. "You'll burn fat faster in this state," she says.

WORDS: CRYSTELLE COULON. PHOTOGRAPHY: BETTY IMAGES. ILLUSTRATIONS: BROWN BIRD DESIGNS. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON QI GONG GO TO TRADITIONALQI.COM.