

## Chinese Medical Breathing Exercises

Chi Kung (Qigong) is a wonderful form of breathwork. I love the approach. It has a beginning, a middle, and an end. It offers a key to ultimate human potential, and it favors balance and moderation. It is an art based on centuries of trial and error.

There are more schools and styles of chi kung than you can shake a stick at. And the techniques and methods can be adapted to suit world class athletes who are in peak condition, or frail elderly people who are confined to bed. The practice of “Chinese Medical Breathing Exercises” is literally good for anyone and everyone.

### The Three Principles of Chi Kung

1. Regulate Mind. This means to quiet the mind, to focus it. It is the practice of meditative awareness. We develop this through a number of methods, for example: “breath watching,” “counting breaths” or “listening inward.”

You can also quiet the mind by meditating on certain energy centers in the body, for example: the ‘dentine’. (This is the center of gravity in your body: just below the navel and about one third the way in toward your spine.)

You can also concentrate on a picture of a saint or your guru; you can stare at a flame, or the moon, or any natural scene. You can also repeat a word, a phrase, or a healing mantra. And there are many other forms of meditation.

### 2. Regulate Body.

This basically means relaxing into different poses and postures.

It can also mean practicing certain movements, such as those taught in “tai chi.” In fact, the basic postures we use in Chi Kung breathing are quite simple, and require little or no practice.

You can lay flat on your back or lie on either side. You can sit cross-legged on the floor, or normally in a chair: let your hands rest naturally on your lap.

You can stand with feet together and hands by your side, like a soldier at attention; or you can stand in a more relaxed way, with feet spread apart to shoulder width, and hands clasped behind your back or resting over your belly button.

### 3. Regulate Breath. This means practicing any number of conscious breathing exercises.

The first is called “natural respiration,” which is a passive, automatic, uncontrolled breathing pattern (slow, quiet, diaphragmatic breathing). Fall back to this form of breathing after any active, controlled, or dynamic breathing exercise.

The next method is called “favorable respiration.” It is an exaggerated form of “natural respiration,” where you deliberately slow and deepen the breathing. Fill the belly up like a balloon on the inhale; then squeeze all the breath out by pulling in on the belly and pulling up on the perineum as you exhale.

Another exercise is called “reverse respiration” or paradoxical breathing. This

dynamic technique calls for you to pull in on the belly button and pull up on the perineum as you inhale; then press down on the perineum and push out on the belly as you exhale. This creates powerful opposing internal forces that act to pack and accumulate energy (chi). It also has a healthy effect on the digestive system.

Chi Kung also makes use of a number of “breath-holding exercises.” For example you can hold the breath in after a full inhale; you can hold the breath out after a full exhale.

You can also allow the breath to pause midway through the inhale, or midway the exhale. But I recommend that people master the rebirthing technique (connected breathing rhythm) before doing any breath holding.

Another way to regulate the breath in Chi Kung is to practice “nasal inhale/oral exhale” (Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth). One more method is “du and ren channel breathing” (also called the “microcosmic orbit”). This means circulating breath-energy through the body’s main energy channels running down the front and up the back. There are a number of other very subtle energy breathing techniques in Chi Kung.

Designing an evolving Chi Kung practice is like ordering off a Chinese menu. We pick a method of quieting the mind from column A, a posture from column B, and a breathing exercise from column C. We select and combine the principles according to individual pleasure and taste.

Whenever anyone comes to me for Chi Kung breathing practice, I have three starting questions in mind: What is the person’s level of health? What is their degree of skill? What is their purpose in training?

Everyone is unique, and naturally, breathwork is different with a young man in peak physical condition than it is with an elderly woman who is bed-ridden. And if a person practices yoga or the martial arts, or already has a breathing practice, then of course, we can start from a different place, and go in a different direction.

Three Types of Chi Kung Exercises:

**Relaxation Exercises.** These involve sensory-awareness exercises and breath-release techniques. And they may also include joint and muscle massage.

**Strengthening Exercises.** These involve powerful breathing techniques and dynamic physical exercises and movements, and energy “packing” skills.

**Inner Training Exercises.** These involve subtle breathing techniques, with a focus on accumulating, conserving, and channeling breath-energy.

Review of Some of the Essentials of Chi Kung.

Relaxed, Quiet, and Natural is the Rule

It may be tempting to turn Chi Kung exercises into a "work out." But remember that it is more mental than muscle; it is more meditation than movement, more subtle than obvious. And so, we avoid forcing and straining.

## Unify Consciousness and Vital Energy

In martial arts, there is the classic teaching of “one-pointed-ness.” That is to bring mind and body together. Tremendous power expresses itself when mind and body act in perfect harmony. This is how bricks are broken and how big burly guys get thrown around by skinny old men. But an even greater force emerges when we bring together mind, body, and breath. This is how healing and growth occurs.

An ancient Chinese maxim is this: “Where consciousness goes, chi flows.” And so in practice, our primary task is to marry consciousness and energy. When you are able to master this skill, you will be able to withstand harsh external elements; you will be able to build up your immune system, to mend a broken bone, to repair an internal organ; you will be able to prevent disease, and speed your recovery from illness or injury.

## Combine and Balance Movement and Stillness

In chi Kung, we always alternate between active and passive exercises. We balance one with the other; we follow and precede one with the other. Balance and rhythm are universal principles. And so, we make them essential elements in the practice.

Alternate your exercises. Balance active techniques with passive forms. Precede and follow dynamic exercises with passive periods of stillness. After periods of passive stillness, do light movement exercises.

## Patience and Persistence

My teacher Hu Bin told me that he once practiced a technique for ten years with no results. Ten years with no results! I was dumbfounded. I told him that it was difficult for me and wagered for most Americans to conceive of such a thing. We in the West try something once, and if nothing happens, we try something else.

Patience is just not built in to our culture. We want immediate results. But believe me, if you practice Chinese Medical Breathing Exercises, tremendous benefits gradually and most certainly sneak up on you. And from time to time, you will even experience quantum leaps in ability and insight.

## Continuity and Regularity

There is power in ritual. Doing the same thing at the same time every day has a surprisingly strong effect over time. It's important to put conscious breathing on a par with other daily rituals, like eating, sleeping, bathing, and going to the toilet! If you don't place Chi Kung high on your list of daily activities, then you simply won't reap the most rewarding benefits that it has to offer.

Note: Here I present a very brief overview of Chi Kung. For a more in-depth study of this ancient style of breathwork, please refer to my book on the subject. It is available at: [www.breathmastery.com](http://www.breathmastery.com).

Final note: Chi Kung, more than other forms of breathwork, requires a good teacher. You'll get much further and go much faster with the help of a genuine

master. There is no substitute for hands-on, one-on-one, personal training. If you can't find me, then look for someone in your area. Or better still: go to the source. Visit China!