

9 Health Benefits of Qigong

Qigong is a form of meditative exercise that focuses on body posture and movement, breathing, and meditation.¹ Qigong is rooted in Taoist philosophy and traditional Chinese medicine. It has been around for over 5,000 years. Qigong roughly translates to cultivating the “inherent functional essence of the human being.”²

The idea behind Qigong is that discomfort and sickness are a result of imbalanced energy within a person. To improve health and prevent disease, a person must balance their internal energy by enhancing the “Qi.” Qigong involves repetitive movements that strengthen, balance, and stretch the body, increase the circulation of bodily fluids, and build awareness of how the body moves through space.³

Physiological Benefits

- 1. Increases Bone Density.** Resistance training and weight-bearing exercises are commonly known to increase bone formation. While Qigong practices involve little to no resistance and weight-bearing, Qigong has been shown to positively affect bone health. A 2006 study found that bone mineral density was increased for women who followed Qigong exercises compared to a no-exercise control group.⁴
- 2. Improves Cardiovascular and Pulmonary Function.** Various studies have reported that Qigong significantly reduces blood pressure when compared to an inactive control.⁵ Furthermore, Qigong is potentially linked to sympathetic and parasympathetic activity, as practicing Qigong has been associated with reduced heart rate and increases in heart rate variability.⁶
- 3. Improves Balance.** A study of patients with muscular dystrophy,⁷ sedentary women,⁸ and healthy elderly adults⁹ found that Qigong improved their balance compared to a control group.
- 4. Immune System Health.** Qigong has been linked to a number of positive immune responses. A 2004 study found improvements in multiple immune-related blood markers after a 1-month Qigong training intervention compared to usual care.¹⁰ Antibody levels in response to flu vaccinations were found to be significantly increased in a group that practiced Qigong.¹¹

Interleukin-6, which is a marker of inflammation, was significantly regulated in response to Qigong compared to a no-exercise group.¹²

- 5. Improves Somatic Symptoms.** Various studies have reported that Qigong is linked to improvements in somatic symptoms, as measured by scales like the Somatization Scale.¹³ Furthermore, participants in the Qigong intervention reported lower perceived stress and intensity of pain compared to the control group.¹⁴

Psychological Benefits

- 1. Improves Quality of Life.** Quality of life measures a person’s “perceived physical health, psychological state, personal beliefs, social relationships and relationship to relevant features of one’s environment.”¹⁵ Various studies across a wide range of participants — including healthy adults, patients with cancer, post-stroke, and arthritis — found that at least one aspect of quality of life was significantly improved by Qigong compared to inactive control groups.¹⁶
- 2. Improves Self-Efficacy.** Self-efficacy is the confidence a person feels when performing behaviors and their perceived ability to overcome the barriers associated with performing them.¹⁷ Self-efficacy — particularly with respect to the “perceived ability to handle stress or novel experiences” — was significantly improved after performing Qigong compared to an inactive control group.¹⁸
- 3. Reduces Stress Biomarkers.** A study of biomarkers related to stress responses found that norepinephrine, epinephrine, and blood cortisol levels were significantly decreased in response to Qigong compared to a control group.¹⁹
- 4. Decreases Depression and Anxiety.** Qigong has been shown to decrease symptoms of depression when compared to an inactive control, as evidenced by scores on depression scales across various studies.²⁰ General mood improved significantly for participants who practiced Qigong compared to a control group.²¹ In addition, anxiety decreased significantly for

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participants practicing Qigong compared to an active exercise group, as assessed by scales like the Self-Rating Anxiety Scale.²²

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Endnotes

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