

What Is Chi Gong? WebMD Medical Reference

Chi Gong is a practice that involves a series of postures and exercises -- including slow, circular movements -- regulated breathing, focused meditation, and self-massage.

One unique feature of Chi Gong is its ability to train the mind to direct the body's energy, or chi, to any part of the body. Some believe that, when moved correctly, chi can bring your body to a natural state of balance. Chi Gong is believed to relax the mind, muscles, tendons, joints, and inner organs -- helping to improve circulation, relieve stress and pain, and restore health.

As with tai chi, a variety of benefits have been linked to Chi Gong. They include:

- Greater stamina and vitality
- Reduced stress
- Enhanced immune system
- Improved cardiovascular, respiratory, circulatory, lymphatic, and digestive function
- Lower blood pressure
- Less risk of falling

Practiced widely in the clinics and hospitals of China, Chi Gong may have broad health benefits.

What Are the Health Benefits of Chi Gong?

Some believe that as a complement to Western medicine, Chi Gong can help the body heal itself, retarding or even reversing the effects of certain diseases linked to aging. Here are a few examples of findings from small studies showing Chi Gong benefits:

- **High blood pressure.** In a study lasting 20 years, patients with hypertension -- whether in the control or Chi Gong group -- were given drugs to control blood pressure. At first, participants in both groups had a drop in blood pressure. But blood pressure in the Chi Gong group stabilized over time. They even were able to lower their use of blood pressure drugs. By contrast, the control group had an increase in blood pressure, requiring greater use of drugs.
- **Immune system.** Just 30 minutes of daily Chi Gong training for one month might produce a tangible impact on the body's immune system. In one study, blood samples taken the day before training started and after it was completed showed a statistically significant difference in white blood cell counts.
- **Stroke.** In one study looking at mortality, among patients who'd suffered a stroke, 86 in the Chi Gong group survived compared with 68 in the control group. That was after a period of 30 years. Compared to the control group, patients practicing Chi Gong had a 50% reduction in death from any cause, death from stroke, and sickness related to stroke. However, it's not clear if the Chi Gong participants were already healthier, making them more likely to live longer.
- **Fibromyalgia.** One small pilot study showed fewer symptoms and improvement in function among patients with fibromyalgia who were practicing Chi Gong.

Fibromyalgia is a chronic condition that can cause widespread pain and fatigue. Larger trials are needed to confirm the results.

Are There Any Special Precautions for Tai Chi or Chi Gong?

Both tai chi and Chi Gong are gentle exercises with few risks. However, if you are older, have a health condition, or have not exercised in a long time, tell your health care provider if you want to try either of these practices. Think of both as complements to Western medicine, and not replacements for it.

In general, use caution if you are pregnant or if you have a joint problem or severe osteoporosis. It is best to not do tai chi or Chi Gong right after eating, if you are very tired, or if you have an active infection.