

# Top 9 Questions Asked by Qigong Newbies

## What is qigong?

Qigong (pronounced chee-GUNG) is a Chinese phrase meaning “cultivation of life energy”. The term is broadly used to describe any system or practice that increases and/or balances the flow of qi, or vital force, through the practitioner. The process of qigong centers on relaxing the body and quieting the mind while engaging in physical movements or postures designed to open the body's energetic pathways (meridians). As qi flows more freely through the body, it cleans the meridians and improves overall health.

## What is qi?

Qi (pronounced **chee** and alternately spelled **chi**) is the vital energy that animates all living things. Referred to as **prana** in systems of yoga and **ki** in the Japanese martial art of Aikido, qi is an invisible yet palpable energy running through the human body. The traditional Chinese medicine of **acupuncture** works with the same energetic channels (meridians) that a qigong practice seeks to open and cleanse.

## Where did qigong originate?

With roots in Chinese medicine, martial arts, and philosophy, the documented history of qigong goes back more than 2500 years. However, the concept of qigong (i.e. consciously working with life energy) dates back much further and easily spans the recorded history of many countries and cultures. Today there are hundreds of systems and thousands of forms qigong, each with its own unique origin and purpose. Healing, sports, and spiritual development are the most common applications of a qigong practice.

## How can qigong impact my health?

The whole-body movements of qigong stretch muscles, open joints, and strengthen tendons. Coordinated with deep breathing, the movements increase circulation of blood and oxygen. Over time, the practice improves flexibility, enhances immune function, and revitalizes internal organs. As the body's meridians open and qi flows freely, emotional blockages are cleared and the body and mind are gently brought into balance.

## Is it better to practice alone or in a group?

Both are important. Group classes provide a fun and practical means of learning a form. Practice groups can strengthen the qi “field” and enhance the learning experience for all students. Since qigong is ultimately about deepening your relationship to your own body, mind and body, the deeper benefits of a qigong usually build through a dedicated solitary practice.

## How is qigong different from exercise?

Physical movement, or exercise, can be an important aspect of qigong, particularly early in one's practice. However, the principal benefits of qigong are gained **not through exertion**, as with running or weight lifting, but through **relaxation**. Rather than focusing on a strictly physical goal (e.g. increasing heart rate, toning a muscle group), qigong directs our attention inward to the sensations of the body, the rhythm of the breath, and the quality, or "flavor" of the movement.

## How is qigong different from yoga & tai chi?

Occasionally referred to as **Chinese Yoga**, qigong shares the yogic aim of using physical movements, breath, and focused attention to bring the practitioner into an inner state of mind-body balance. Many students find the slow, fluid movements of qigong an ideal complement to the rigorous poses of yoga. **Tai chi** is a **style of qigong** composed of slow, relaxed, fluid movements. Considered a “soft” or internal martial art, **tai chi forms** typically relate to martial movements such as blocking, striking, and punching.

## What is Sheng Zhen Qigong?

Sheng Zhen is a system of moving and non-moving qigong received by Master Li Jun Feng, former head coach of the Beijing wushu (martial arts) team. Since its beginning in Manila in 1987, the practice has been taught to thousands of people in more than 25 countries and is represented by more than 100 certified teachers. While each of the 15 standing and seated forms benefit physical health, all Sheng Zhen qigong forms share a common purpose: **to open and purify the heart**.

## What can I expect from a qigong practice?

Physical health, personal history, and emotional readiness are some of the factors that will shape your experience. Movements that facilitate qi flow often draw awareness to areas of the body where qi is "stuck", which may initially feel uncomfortable. Gradually as you relax the body and gain coordination, habitual tension and adaptive patterns begin to "let go", allowing qi to flow more easily in the system. **Self-compassion** and **uncritical self-observation** are two vital keys to realizing these deeper benefits.

*Based in Burnsville, North Carolina, **Eastside Qigong** teaches the Chinese-based movement arts of qigong and tai chi to adult practitioners of all fitness levels. Classes are focused on leading students on inward journeys to develop their unique creative talents while building confidence and increasing joy in their lives.*