

# Walking and Qi Gong

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An integral part of Traditional Chinese Medicine is the concept of energy or Qi. This Qi flows through our bodies constantly and supplies each

and every cell with the “electricity” it needs to get its particular job done. As long as the Qi keeps moving, the body will stay healthy. When the Qi becomes stagnant, physical and emotional problems will arise.

Long periods of inactivity allow the energy to congest and clog up within us. Traditional Chinese Medicine considers a sedentary lifestyle to be one of the biggest contributing factors for developing illness. The American Heart Association agreed with this when they published the fact that a sedentary lifestyle increases your risk of heart disease to the same degree as it would be if you smoked a pack of cigarettes every day! Unfortunately, according to a 1998 report of the American Medical Association, 60% of Americans lead completely sedentary lifestyles. ([www.walkfarther.com](http://www.walkfarther.com))

Many of us go from a stressful day at work to sitting on the couch until it's time for bed. As we sit there, the energy in our bodies becomes more and more stagnant. We think about getting up to go to the gym but it seems so far away and the effort to get there, get changed, work out, and get back home seems overwhelming, so we continue to sit and another day goes by.

One of the simplest and most satisfying forms of exercise is walking. Prior to the growth of the automobile industry in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, walking several miles per day was a normal and necessary activity for most people. Walking isn't just a form of exercise but it is also a potent healing movement. The power of walking lies in its ability to regulate the body's activities. Each

step creates a rhythm that regulates breathing, heart rate, digestion, and even thinking.

Western science has taken a good hard look at walking and found it to be very effective for promoting health in the body. Deva Parnell writes that for people 40 years and older, a sedentary lifestyle reduces the heart muscle enzyme activity by 1-2% per year ([www.discoveryyoga.com/walking](http://www.discoveryyoga.com/walking)). This relates to a decrease in the ability of the cardiovascular system to transport oxygen throughout the body. Parnell states that walking stimulates production of heart muscle enzymes and prevents deterioration of the cardiovascular system with age. Walking also creates improved muscle tone in the arteries and veins, allowing the heart to pump more blood with each stroke and also lowers body-fat levels.

The Vascular Disease Foundation also states that in addition to its many direct cardiovascular benefits, walking offers the indirect benefits of helping to control diabetes and obesity, two conditions that strain the heart. ([www.walkfarther.com](http://www.walkfarther.com))

A huge Nurses Health Study published in the Archives of Internal Medicine followed the health of over 120,000 nurses over a 20 year period showed that walking an hour a day, or a total of seven hours a week, is associated with a 20% decreased risk for breast cancer and a 50% decreased risk of Type II diabetes. Walking as little as a half hour a day, or three hours a week, is associated with a 30% decreased risk of heart disease. This study recommended walking at a brisk pace such as 3 to 3.9 miles per hour or a rate where you may be breathing hard but would not be out of breath. ([www.walking.about.com](http://www.walking.about.com))

Many people read, talk, or watch TV while exercising to make the time go by faster. However, to get the most healing benefits from walking, Traditional Chinese Medicine teaches us that the mind should be focused, thus walking becomes a Qi Gong exercise known as walking meditation. Walking meditation is a simple yet profound healing experience; no distractions, just awareness. It's not about talking or socializing or thinking while you're

walking; your mind is peacefully present and relaxed.

## Walking Meditation

Walking outside in the fresh air is the best but if the weather is not good or there are safety issues such as tripping hazards, walking indoors is better than not walking at all. The basic instructions for walking meditation are very simple: the breath must be coordinated with the movement of the legs and the inhale and exhale should be of equal length.

For example, if you took three steps to inhale, you would take three steps to exhale. Walking and breathing faster during the walking meditation is suggested for more serious conditions such as cancer, but either way, fast or slow, make the inhale and exhale the same length and number of steps taken.

To help keep the mind present and relaxed with the meditation, counting each step is a very common method. For example, on the inhale you would step with the right foot and mentally say the number “one,” the left foot would be “two” and the right would be “three.” On the exhale you would step with the left foot and think “one,” then the right foot and think “two” and finally the left foot and think “three” and repeat. For a faster pace you might take two steps on the inhale and two on the exhale.

Another common technique is to say a short phrase or personal statement that has the same number of syllables as the count would such as “I – am” on the inhale for the two count and “Health – y” for the exhale. For the three count stepping you might say “Heal - ing - light,” one syllable for each of the three steps of the inhale and “Flows - through - me,” one syllable for each step of the exhale. Any set of words or mantra that has personal meaning to you would be appropriate for this meditation.

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