

Taiji-Qigong Breathing Training

Regulation of the Breath

Emotions affect breathing. Your emotions must be calm in order for your breathing to be calm. The mind and breathing are also interdependent. Deep and calm breathing relaxes the body and mind. It fills the lungs with air so that the brain and body can have an adequate supply of oxygen. In addition, deep and complete breathing moves the diaphragm up and down which massages and stimulates the internal organs. For this reason deep breathing exercises are also called “internal organ exercises.” Deep breathing does not mean filling the lungs to full capacity because that would tense the muscles and interfere with the absorption of oxygen. Use only 70 to 80 per cent of the lungs capacity. When you regulate your breathing, the first priority is to keep the lungs calm and relaxed.

There are eight key words for breathing which a Qigong practitioner should follow during practice: calm, slender, deep, long, continuous, uniform, slow soft.

Steps in Taiji-Qigong Breath Training

If you are a complete beginner in Qigong, the training sequence starts with the practice of **Back to Childhood Breathing**, where you expand the abdomen and lower the perineum while inhaling and contract the abdomen and raise the perineum while exhaling. All movements are done gently.

After you are accustomed to Back to Childhood, begin practicing **Reverse Abdominal Breathing**, which is used any time the qigong practitioner has intention to move the Qi strongly. Here you contract the abdomen and lift the perineum while inhaling and expand the abdomen and lower the perineum while exhaling. All movements are done gently.

After you can perform Reverse Breathing in a relaxed and comfortable manner, you begin training how to lead the Qi. Since the Qi flows where the mind leads it, you lead the Qi by placing the mind in the intended destination.

The first step in leading the Qi is **Yongquan Breathing**. Here you breathe in and out the Kidney 1 gates at the bottom of the feet. On exhalation, you place the mind below the feet and visualize the flow of breath and Qi down and out the bottoms of the feet and imagine that the feet are pressing into the Earth. On inhalation, you place the mind in the Real Lower Dan Tian and visualize breath and Qi flowing in through the bottoms of the feet and up to the Real Lower Dan Tian.

After you are comfortable with Yongquan breathing, move to **Four Gates Breathing**, adding the Laogong (Pericardium 8) gates in the palms. The palms are held at hip level facing the Earth with the elbows and wrists not too sharply bent. (Sharp bends in the joints inhibit the Qi flow.) Everything is the same as in Yongquan breathing, except you are now including the hands.

When Four Gates breathing is comfortable, one begins the practice of **Grand Circulation Breathing** to strengthen the flow of Qi to the arms and hands. Half way into your inhalation, tuck the tailbone under slightly to open the Ming Men gate between L2 and L3. Place the mind in the Da Zhui point GV 14, right below the bump in your collar bone and visualize Qi flowing to Da Zhui. Then on exhalation, lead the Qi out the hands and feet. This "trick" enables you to increase the flow of Qi to the arms and hands for Taiji Ball Qigong, martial power or exchanging Qi with the environment.

For more information on these elements of Qigong Breathing see Dr. Yang, Jwing Ming's DVD, Understanding Qigong 2, Key Points of Qigong: Qigong Breathing, available from Qi Elements or YMAA.com.