

White Crane Soft Qigong

Introduction

White Crane Soft Qigong was developed to help White Crane Kung Fu practitioners learn to manifest Jin (explosive power) using the spine and chest and to help them recover from the stresses of their martial training. White Crane Qigong is one of the best exercises for health. This qigong helps you to rebuild or increase the strength of your spine and chest. It will also strengthen the body's muscles, tendons and ligaments. Internally, the exercises will help improve Qi storage and circulation. The exercises are beneficial for relieving stiffness of joints, healing injured or painful joints, and healing and preventing diseases of the spine and of the organs and tissues of the chest.

During the practice, you imitate the movements of long-distance migratory birds like the crane. These birds can fly long distances because their wing movements are coordinated with their chest movements. In White Crane Qigong the most important element is the movement of the chest and spine. The spine is alternately arced back and flexed forward while the chest is alternately sunken inward and arced backward. Shoulders are kept down and relaxed.

As with most Qigong practices, your body should be relaxed, your breathing should be soft and slender and your mind should be in a meditative state. Relax your muscles, tendons and joints. You can use either normal abdominal breathing or reverse abdominal breathing. Practitioners who want to go deeper into internal energy work with the exercises can incorporate Four Gates Breathing or Grand Circulation Breathing to lead the Qi to the area being trained.

If a joint is painful during movement, try to extend the movement *slightly* into the range of the pain. Be careful not to do too many repetitions at once. Over time, gradually extend the range of motion and the number of repetitions. (If the joint is more than normally painful the day after exercising, you have done too many repetitions.) Within a few months, you should be able to extend the range of pain-free motion. Of course, for serious joint injuries, one should consult a physician.

Basic White Crane Qigong Exercises

Warm-ups

It is important to warm up the muscles, tendons and joints, especially the spine and chest, before doing the White Crane exercises so that the body can move easily and fluidly.

Loosening the Joints

Shake wrists and elbows

Shake the whole body
Swing arms side to side
Circle the torso
Circle the hips
Feet together and circle the knees
Circle the ankles

Stretching (the Four Seasons Medical Qigong All-Season Routine)

Two Hands Hold the Heavens
Loosening the Neck (Large Dragon Loosens its Neck)
Horizontal circles
Wave the spine and loosen the internal organs
Thrust the Chest and Arc the Chest
White Crane Waves Its Wings
White Crane Shakes Its Wings

Fundamental Practices

Except for finger waving gong, movements should involve the whole body moving in two large arcing waves. One wave moves from the center of the chest to the tips of the fingers. The other wave runs vertically up the spine. For White Crane martial artists, this vertical wave starts at the waist and runs up the spine to the base of the neck. Taijiquan practitioners may find this difficult since they are trained to begin their movements at the bottoms of the feet. It is okay to continue to move from the bottoms of the feet in White Crane Qigong.

Practice 20 to 50 or more repetitions for each movement, but increase the number of repetitions gradually.

It is important to incorporate the White Crane hand form in the exercises (except for finger waving and swimming octopus). The thumb and index finger are pushed slightly forward of the middle finger, thumb held below the index finger, while the ring and pinkie fingers are lifted slightly behind the middle finger. The fingers are relaxed and firm, not limp.

Instructions for the Movements

Finger Waving:

- This exercise can be used for either of two goals. To loosen, relax and help heal painful joints move in a relaxed manner. To build the endurance and strength of the tendons and muscles, slightly tense the muscles and tendons.

- Bend only the base joint of the fingers. Keep the second and third joints straight. Wave the fingers from the thumb to the pinkie 30-50 times. Then wave from the pinkie to the thumb 30-50 times. You can exercise both hands at once.

Swimming Octopus:

- In this exercise the focus is on both the fingers and the wrists. Its goals are the same as in finger waving gong. It is also useful for increasing the wrist's range of motion and for healing and prevention of carpal tunnel syndrome.
- Move the palm forward with the mind in the Lao Gong cavity in the center of the palm (PC 8) and stretch the fingers back to open the Lao Gong. Then move the hand backward, bring the fingers together and stretch them to stretch the wrist. At first focus on connecting the shoulder, elbow, and wrist in movement like a slow soft whip. Once this is achieved, focus on adding connection to waist and chest. When doing single hand, turn the waist and Kua. When doing both hands, open and close the chest.

Sideways Spreading

- White Crane Kung Fu artists use these movements to train defensive hand techniques, but it is also useful for loosening and increasing the range of motion of the wrists and loosening and relaxing the back and chest.
- Breathing is according to the martial pattern of exhaling on Yang (outward movement) and inhaling on Yin (inward movement).
- Start by arcing the back and sinking the chest while inhaling and scooping both arms upward close to the chest fingers pointing up and palms turning first toward you then outward. Then while exhaling, expand both the arms to the sides turning the palms out, straightening the torso, and expanding the chest. Vary the exercise by reversing the movement downward. Then mix the movement with one hand going upward and the other downward.

Downward Dropping

- In White Crane Kung Fu this movement is used to train the sinking motion from the wrist and forearm to seal or control the actions of the opponent's upper limbs. It is also useful for training coiling Jin for Taiji Qin Na practice. For health purposes, this movement helps to loosen and relax the wrist, elbows and shoulders for the prevention and healing of injuries, stiffness and disease of those joints.

- Breathing is according to the martial pattern of exhale on Yang (outward movement) and inhale on Yin (inward movement).
- Begin by arcing your back and sinking your chest while inhaling and scooping both of your arms upward with fingers pointed upward. Then while exhaling, move the arms outward to the front with the fingers pointing forward. Continuing to exhale, turn the fingers to point downward as you straighten your torso and expand your chest. After you gain experience in this movement, gradually replace muscular force with relaxed and soft movements and mental concentration.

Arm Flapping

- This exercise trains the coordination of with the flapping action of the arms. As with the exercises above, it is beneficial for the joints.
- Begin on inhalation, arcing the back and sinking the chest and folding the arms across the chest.
- Next on exhalation, flap the arms out to the sides either up, sideways or down.

Coiling

- Both White Crane and Taijiquan martial artists use this exercise to train coiling Jin. The twisting movement provides additional benefit for the shoulder, elbow, and wrist joints. When the tendons and muscles wrap around the bones of the arms and shoulders during the twisting movement, the pressure on the piezoelectric cells of the bones generates bioelectricity (Qi) thereby helping to improve the health of the bones.
- Breathing is according to the martial pattern of exhale on Yang (outward movement) and inhale on Yin (inward movement).
- Start with the elbow bent and the hand in front of the shoulder, palm down. White Crane Kung Fu artists initiate the movement from the waist. For others, the movement can be initiated at the bottoms of the feet and directed by the waist. Extend the arm at shoulder height, turning the palm up, and moving the arm like a snake coiling around a tree branch. You must be soft and relaxed so that you can stick and adhere to the “tree branch.” Put the other hand on the Dan tian to feel the waist turning in directing the movement. You can vary the exercise by doing both arms at once, by alternating the arms and by repeating one arm at a time to enhance the feeling in the joints. You can enhance the

twisting effect by focusing on the thumb and little finger at the end of the arm's extension but be careful to keep the muscles relaxed.

Crane Neck Gong

- Martial arts use this movement to help train the muscles and joints of the neck to prevent injury during Jin training. The exercise is beneficial for loosen and relax the cervical vertebrae.
- Generate a small and gentle wave motion from the waist or bottoms of the feet. Keep this motion small and gentle until it reaches the base of the neck, and then gently amplify it as you lead the motion up the neck and to the crown of the head. The joints and muscles of the neck should remain relaxed. Repeat the motion 20 times with the facing straight forward, then gradually turn the head to one side then the other. Keep the shoulders square to the front when turning the head.

Soothe the Lung

- This movement serves to cool down and soothe the spine and chest after qigong training. It is especially important as a recovery form after hard Jin training. It also helps to break up stagnant Qi and trapped emotions as well as to promote the circulation of blood and qi in the chest.
- The movement is like sighing with both the bow of the spine and the bow of the chest moving. While inhaling, expand your chest forward with the shoulders gently pushing backward and generate a wave motion from the waist. Then while exhaling, bring the wave upward through the spine to the top of the chest while circling your shoulders to the side and then to the front. You can softly make the sound of "Hen" [pronounced Heng] when exhaling to enhance the relaxation effect.

White Crane Soft Qigong Moving Set

Move your body like a slow, soft whip with every part connected from—as discussed above—either the waist or the bottoms of the feet to the tips of the fingers. Movements flow slowly, gently and comfortably through every joint. The body must be soft and relaxed.

In many of the movements you will feel the body moving in two arcs—one from the feet and legs up through the spine and the other from the center of the chest and out to the fingertips of each hand. Try to coordinate the movement of those two arcs smoothly.

Use either Normal Abdominal Breathing or Reverse Abdominal Breathing. Coordinate your breathing with your body's movements. You can inhale as your "wings" expand and exhale when they contract, or do the opposite. Use whatever method feels comfortable. Just be consistent. Persons suffering asthma or other illnesses of the bronchial tubes should try inhaling when the shoulders are back and the chest is arched forward and exhaling when the shoulders are forward and the back is arched backward. This type of breathing is one of the Qigong treatments for asthma.

Remember the imagery of a crane perched on top of a tall bamboo tree moving its wings to maintain its stability as a breeze slowly builds and then slowly abates.

The movements can be done in three modes: stationary, rocking and walking. In stationary mode, the feet are even at about hip or shoulder width apart. In rocking mode, one foot is in front and the weight is shifted from about a 60-40 ratio in favor of the front leg to a 40-60 ratio in favor of the back leg in coordination with the arm movements. In walking mode, you step forward or backward as in Taiji walking in coordination with the arms movements. When performing alternating single wing flying, vary your weight shifting in rocking and your stepping in walking between moving in coordination with the same side arm and the opposite side arm.

White Crane Flying Cong Palm Set

Forward and Backward Flying

Double Wing Flying

Single Wing Flying (Alternating the arms. Imagine the wind is blowing from the side, and you have to twist your body to maintain your balance.)

Left and Right Flying (arms move to the sides and up over your head)

Double Wing

Single Wing Flying

Straight Backwards Flying (arms move sideways to the rear)

Double Wing Flying

Single Wing Flying (Alternating)

Internal Circular Flying-Vertical Palm (arms circling forward from outside to inside)

Double Wing Flying

Single Wing Flying

Internal Circular Flying—Horizontal Palm

Double Wing Flying

Single Wing Flying

Internal Circular Flying--Combination--(Palm changes up and down)

Double Wing Flying (Eagle Attacks Its Prey)

Lion Rotates the Ball (Lion Rolls the Ball)

External Circular Flying—Vertical Palm (Arms circle forward from inside to outside.)

Double Wing Flying

Single Wing Flying

External Circular Flying—Horizontal Palm

Double Wing Flying

Single Wing Flying

External Circular Flying--Combination—

Double Wing (Large Bear Swims in the Water)

Single Wing (Left and Right to Open the Mountains)

Backward Circular Flying (like Taiji Ball Vertical Circle underhand.)

Double Wing Flying

Single Wing Flying

Forward Circular Flying (like Taiji Ball Vertical Circle overhand.)

Double Wing Flying

Single Wing Flying

Baby Crane Waves Its Wings (a cool down exercise, with soft and relaxed motions)

Double Wing Flying (Inhale while raising arms up. Exhale when lowering the arms.) This movement is also used in the Qigong for Breast Cancer Prevention.

Single Wing Flying

References: On background and theory, Dr. Yang Jwing Ming, The Essence of Shaolin White Crane, Martial Power and Qigong, pp. 187-188, 202-203, 214-221. Illustrations of the movements, Dr. Yang Jwing Ming, The Essence of Shaolin White Crane, White Crane Hard & Soft Qigong, DVD