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Back Pain Relief

Chinese Qigong for
Healing and Prevention

氣功防治腰酸背疼

Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming

2nd
Edition

QIGONG—HEALTH AND HEALING

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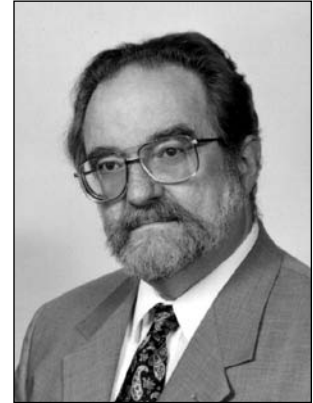
Foreword

Thomas G. Gutheil, MD

Professor of Psychiatry

Harvard Medical School

Ever since primitive man and woman reared up from their knuckles into the upright posture, the groan of “My aching back!” has echoed down the corridors of history in workplaces, homes and hospitals. There are many reasons for this historical fact, a number of which have to do with lifestyle changes, fitness and the modern environment, all of which were spelled out by Dr. Yang in the preface to his first edition and again in the preface to this revised edition. Not only does the back “carry” the body but it also “carries” many of the psychological tensions that constitute our modern life.



In my psychiatric training I learned this: to look at posture and body position for clues to a person’s mental state: the stooped back whose owner seemed bowed by the weight of depression, the shoulders drawn in and tight and the head retracted like a turtle’s in anticipation of the below that comes only in the patient’s imagination, and similar signs.

In my medical training I learned this: back pain is one of the hardest conditions to treat effectively. The most common approaches—protracted bed rest, lying on a firm surface, time off from work—are extremely difficult for the average person to follow. Noncompliance with the regimen is extremely common. Pain medications work somewhat, but risk addiction. Muscle relaxants work somewhat but have troubling side effects. Surgery works as a last resort but can make some cases worse. As a young doctor my heart would sink whenever a case of lower back pain came into the clinical emergency room, because each one carried with it the specter of the failure of Western medicine.

From my Gongfu training with Dr. Yang I learned this: he is a dedicated scholar and a gifted teacher. He merits the highest praise, however, for his efforts to meld Eastern and Western medical understanding in hopes of achieving greater synergy between the two—in hopes that the two world views, combined, will be greater than the sum of their parts.

To this end, he has thoroughly revised the first edition of this book, which featured his comprehensive and wide-ranging exploration of Qi theory from its historical to its present context; of the structure and function of the back; and of the Western and Eastern approaches to healing it. This revised edition features added Chinese characters supplied for Chinese terminology to help illuminate the Chinese origin of some of these concepts. In addition he has added some new concepts of explaining Qi and Qigong from the Western point of view; these changes further express Dr. Yang’s lifelong aim of

connecting Chinese and Western medical science. Finally, Dr. Yang has discovered that some of the strenuous exercises described in the first edition—which might tax persons with serious back pain—can be done from the floor instead of from a vertical stance; additional approaches for this posture have been supplied in the current revised edition.

This edition continues the approach of the previous version, in that the first chapter alone serves as an excellent and clear introduction to the basic Eastern medical and martial arts idea of Qi. So well structured is this discussion that it requires no previous familiarity with this concept. The remainder of the book employs clear descriptions, relevant illustrations and well-organized instructions to achieve the goal of providing protection and relief from back pain.

Finally, martial arts are inseparable from morality. In the present context, Dr. Yang compassionately but firmly, like a great sports coach, warns against the moral pitfalls of impatience, laziness and fear. He encourages readers to strive to stretch their limits—carefully!—to master pain and weakness in the back. The book you hold in your hands is a noteworthy contribution to this goal.

Testimonials—#1

Roger Whidden

Having a healthy back, in my case, truly required committing myself to a healthy Way of Life. Central to this healthy Way of Life has been my study of Martial Arts for the past 23 years—the last 6 years of which I have pursued with the guidance of Master Yang.

Many of you who read this will be able to prevent or cure back problems by simple, regular practice of the movements and methods contained within this book. Some of you may need to go much deeper as I have needed to, and solve the inner mysteries that have led to your back problems. In either case, I believe all will benefit, as I have, with regular practice of these time tested techniques.

In my life, my poor health manifested most intensely through severe, debilitating pain in my lower back. I was often completely incapacitated during my teens and early adulthood. My suffering can be traced back to a severe injury when I was six years old. I had my toes cut off of my left foot and surgically reattached. Subsequently, my functionally “club” foot distorted my whole skeletal growth through my formative years. By the age of 21, I was told by prominent Medical Doctors that I had the “spine of a senior citizen,” “I would never be a carpenter,” “I would never have a job on my feet,” “I would never be a gymnast,” “to get a desk job,” etc. From the perspective of eliminating pain, Traditional Medicine could offer only drugs and surgery. I did not feel I could restore my health following this path.

Fortunately, I had been training in the Martial Arts for 3 years, and I had glimpsed a ray of hope. Although the knowledge I was exposed to was only superficial relative to the knowledge Dr. Yang shares, I was on “The Way.” Along “The Way” I found adjunctive healing modalities helpful to the development of my healthy core and spinal health. Truly, Chiropractic Acupuncture, various massage forms, dietary changes, and Graduate Studies in Holistic Education and Counseling have been major players in my health prescription. Again central to these healing methods was my internal development, mainly due to my daily Martial Arts practice. For many years I was training just to avoid pain and, depending on these “alternative” therapies, to straighten me out when I erred. Gradually, as my practice moved toward health, rather than just away from illness, my dependence on external therapies for alleviation of pain virtually ceased. Now, I can use these healing tools on occasion to prevent disorder and deepen my health.

The techniques described in this book can be made central or adjunctive to your healing process. Either way, it is important to take note of those main themes of this book that are also common to traditional Martial Arts learning and a core part of any health prescription. Central themes to transform your injury or sickness into a healing learning event are: taking responsibility for your life, a leap of faith (not blind faith) in the healing process, an acceptance of the difficulty of life, and a full commitment to the learning/healing/life process.

If “age is the condition of the spine” (Yogic belief), then a painful spine is an old spine. It is diseased not at ease. Regular practice of the movements described in this book by Master Yang, in a relaxed, centered, and grounded manner will help guide you out of disease and into ease, improve the condition of your spine, bring a loving youthful bounce back to your step, and help you to understand yourself and life’s mysteries. I know this to be true.

Roger Whidden
Martial Arts Teacher, Builder
Married, father of three.

Testimonials—#2

Jeff Rosen

Three days before my college graduation, I had the misfortune to be a passenger in a Subaru that broad-sided a Lincoln Continental. At the hospital, the doctor asked me what I did for my scoliosis. “What scoliosis?” I asked, unsure whether it was a spine or a liver problem. “This one,” he said, holding up an x-ray that looked more like a roller coaster than a spine.

Up to that point I had no problems with my back. I trained in Karate and Kung Fu, and though my left side kick and right front kick wobbled when thrown, I always assumed it had something to do with laziness. In the back of my head, I had wondered why I could do a split but not touch my toes. But, like many other 22 year-olds, I moved on to other thoughts rather than resolve those.

After the accident, I spent nearly two years trying to contain a constant, severe ache. Doctors recommended nautilus and walking. Chiropractors shrugged and apologized. Two years after the accident, I returned to Tai Chi. I also got Rolfed. Now, when I practiced diligently, I could have pain free days if I didn’t stress my back. The problem with this situation was that I owned an ice cream truck business. If you have never had the pleasure, let me inform you that being an ice cream truck driver, and especially, knowing other ice cream truck drivers, can really stress your back. So, I resigned myself to low-level pain.

By 1990, I was out of the ice cream truck and in an office. I practiced my form regularly and had contained my back problems. It ached when I was tired, stressed or physically active. I was prepared to live with that.

Then, in August of 1990, I stopped by the YMAA school just to take a look. From the first warm-up exercises, I saw a new path. Spine loosening and flexing is a focal point of all of the training. It takes years to begin to understand how to move the spine, how to relax the joints and the muscles in and around the spine. The process opened my eyes. Although over the years I had bored many a friend with back pain discussions (have you ever been engaged in an interesting one?), I didn’t know my back. I didn’t know how to move individual pieces and relax individual muscles.

The health benefits associated with learning to move this way are enormous. I am, except when I do something stupid (and I do), entirely pain free. I own a small restaurant, where I also cook. I can spend 10 hours on my feet with the fryolators gurgling and the customers screaming and go home pain free. But it is more than that. My self-image has been transformed. I no longer feel like the person who can’t help move a couch. I no longer wonder whether a hike is going to cause me pain. Though people in my classes might beg to differ, I feel supple. I can move like a reed.

I am very grateful for my YMAA training, particularly for the relaxation of my spine. It has freed me from pain, and shown me a path to healthy feeling.

Jeff Rosen



6-37



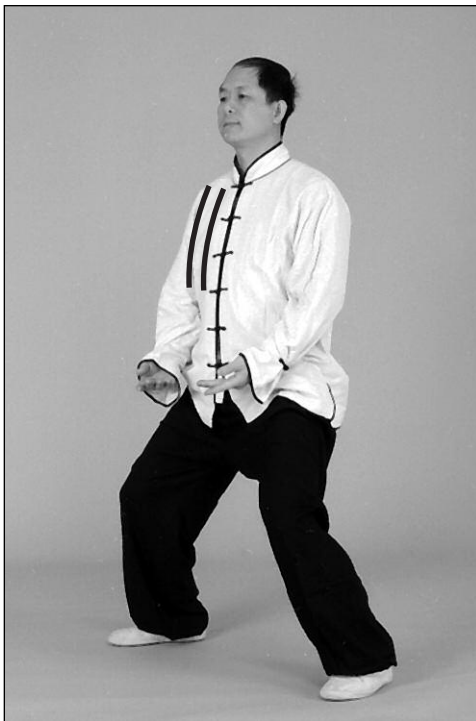
6-38

Qi and blood circulation at the vertebrae joints for healing, but it will also gradually recondition your spine structure from weak to strong. Remember, spine movement is the key to maintaining spinal health. This is also the key to strengthening your immune system.

Again, you may practice this spine movement while sitting as well as standing. Simply generate the wave motion from the sacrum and move it upward while coordinating with your breathing (Figures 6-37 and 6-38). Be aware of the stiffness of your spine whenever you sit for too long while either driving or working. Lift your arms up and stretch your torso first. Then perform the above spinal movements to exercise the spine and loosen it.

White Crane Waves Its Wing (Bai He Dou Chi, 白鹤抖翅). Once you have completed the loosening up of the chest area and spine, extend the motion to your arms and fingers. When you extend the movement to the arms, you first place your both palms in front of your abdominal area, facing forward (Figure 6-39). Next, generate the wave motion from the legs or the waist and direct this power upward (Figure 6-40). It passes through the chest and shoulders and finally reaches the arms (Figure 6-41). Repeat at least ten times. Naturally, if you feel comfortable, you may practice more.

Right after you have finished the above two hands' waving exercises, you should then practice one hand waving exercises. The additional benefit which you may obtain over two hands' waving is you are now twisting your joints from the ankles, hips, spine and finally reaching to the finger tips. This will help to loosen and strengthen the joint areas. When



6-39



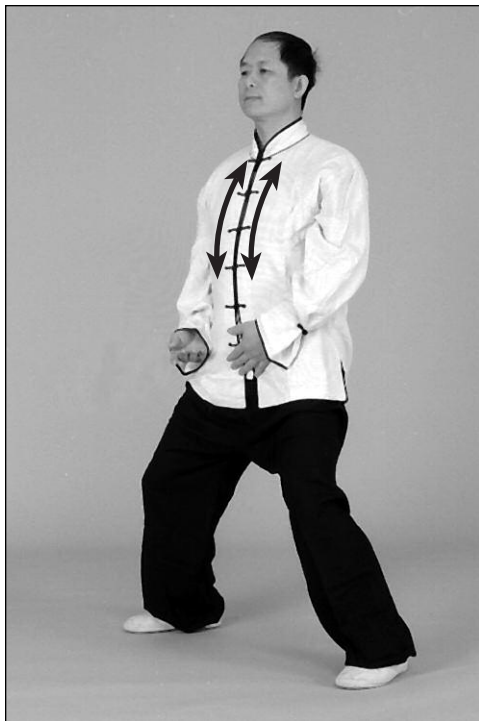
6-40

you practice with one arm, again you place both your palms right in front of your abdominal area with the right palm facing out and the left palm lightly touching the abdomen (Figure 6-42). Then, you generate the twisting motion from the bottom of your feet, upward through the knees and hips, through every section of the spine, and finally allowing it to pass through the shoulders and reach to the finger tips (Figures 6-43 and 6-44). Practice ten times for each arm.

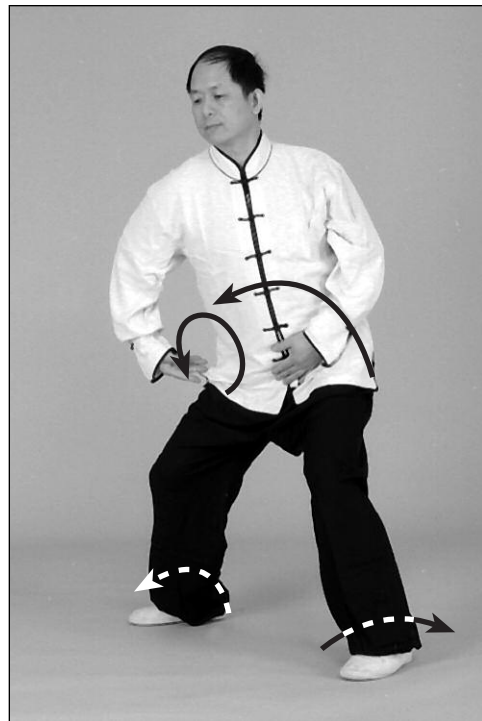
Again, you may practice this Qigong exercise while you are sitting (Figures 6-45 to 6-48). These exercises will loosen up every joint in your body from the waist to the fingers. Moreover, they lead the Qi out from the central body to the limbs. If you are not leading the excess Qi out, the body will become too Yang and you may become tense again. The key to healing and relaxation is to



6-41



6-42



6-43

lead the excess Qi out of the body through the limbs. These movements have been found beneficial for healing chest problems such as asthma, chest cancer, lung problems and heart problem.

Recovery. After you have completed the above spine waving movements, continue to lead the Qi out of your body through the limbs. The easiest way is to swing your arms forward and backward by imitating a natural human activity—walking. Simply swing your arms forward to the height of the shoulders (Figure 6-49) and then let them drop and swing back by themselves (Figure 6-50). Repeat about 200 times. Naturally, you may swing from 5 minutes to half an hour depending on your health. Swinging the arms is one of the easiest laymen Qigong practices, simple and easy for anyone.



6-44



6-45



6-46



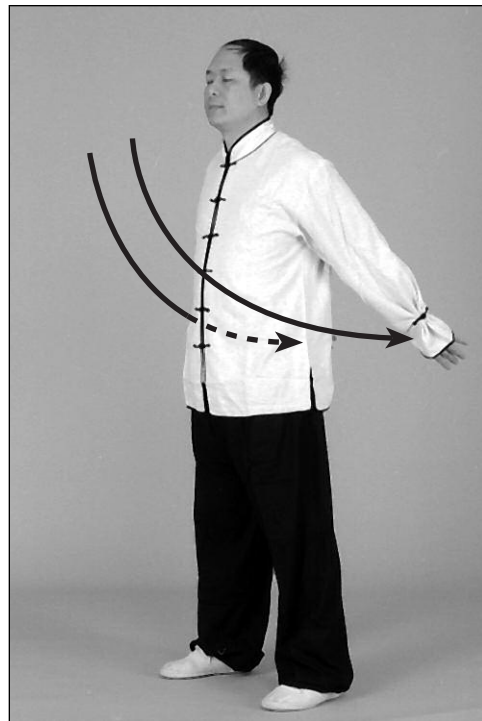
6-47



6-48



6-49



6-50

Next, continue your swinging while at the same time walking in place with your knees as high as your hips. Every time you raise your knee, you gently push back your lower back (Figure 6-51). This will generate a comfortable forward and backward movement to exercise the lower back. Again if it is comfortable start with 50 steps and when you feel stronger, increase the number of repetitions.

Finally, you should lead the Qi to the bottom of your feet. Continue your arm swinging. When your arms are lifting, raise up your heels and when your arms are down, make your heels touch the floor (Figure 6-52). Repeat about 20 to 30 times. If you start with more than 30, you may experience cramping in your calf.

When you practice this exercise, you do not have to worry about your breathing. Simply breathe naturally and smoothly. You may even watch television while you are swinging your arms. This is why it is called laymen Qigong. It is simple and easy, without too much training of concentrated mind and breathing.

On the Floor

If you have already had serious back problems, you may find the above exercises to be too strenuous. In this case, follow the exercises by using the floor, at least at first. After you feel stronger and more comfortable, you can practice normally.

The point of using the floor is to ease the pressure onto your vertebrae by removing the upper body's weight. The basic posture is kneeling down on the floor. If you can

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