

# Qi Gong and Neck and Shoulder Pain

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Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) considers that pain is an indication that Qi (energy) has gotten trapped or stuck in a particular area. Qi can get stuck for many reasons but the most common are physical distress on an area (bad posture, injury, tissue damage) and emotional stress (holding in emotions).

Some areas of the body are more prone to pain than others due to our sedentary and stressful lifestyles. According to the National Center of Health Statistics, one in five Americans has had neck pain in the last three months ([www.cdc/nchs.gov](http://www.cdc/nchs.gov)). Also, the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons reports that about 4 million people in the U.S. seek medical care each year for shoulder problems including about 1.5 million visits to orthopedic surgeons yearly ([Sportsmedicine.about.com](http://Sportsmedicine.about.com)).

Repetitive motions of writing, typing, reading, and driving take up a large proportion of our day and lead to trouble with the neck and shoulders in particular. On a more metaphysical level, stress has specific associations with the neck and shoulders. If you want to know if stress is a factor for your neck pain, ask yourself what or who is a pain in the neck for you. For shoulder pain, you could also ask yourself what weight or burden you are shouldering. While this won't necessarily alleviate the pain, it can be illuminating and useful when looking at making some lifestyle changes.

While the neck and shoulder problems could be mainly from a very physical reason or mainly from an

emotional reason, there is a pattern I see in my private practice that is an equal share of both and is the most common pattern when I treat people who have symptoms of carpal tunnel syndrome. This pattern involves a repetitive motion such as typing at a job or workplace at which the patient hates being. It is as if each letter typed is in opposition to what the patient really wants to do. This opposition causes the Qi to get trapped in the neck and shoulders in a profound way and physical symptoms will arise.

Neck and shoulder pain should be evaluated by a physician to determine any serious underlying causes. After this has been done, Qi Gong can play a significant role in improving the pain and healing the area, even as an adjunct to whatever medical advice your doctor has prescribed.

The best way to avoid neck and shoulder pain is to have a varied and active lifestyle that incorporates lots of movement and avoids prolonged sitting. That can be quite a challenge to create. The following Qi Gong exercise is quite effective in helping to move the Qi through the neck and shoulders and can significantly improve symptoms of pain. While doing this exercise, only move in ways that are comfortable for your particular situation. If you notice any pain while doing the exercise, decrease the range of motion of the stretches until you find that it no longer hurts or lower your arms to a more comfortable height. Over time as the Qi flow becomes better, you will find your range of motion has increased but if you force the range of motion and ignore the pain, the Qi flow will actually decrease and improvement will slow down.



**Summer/Fall Qi Gong**

Bring your arms in front of you with the elbows bent and your palms facing each other a few inches apart in front of your chest. The elbows are sunk down and the shoulders relaxed. Inhaling, draw the right arm back, palm up at the level of the chest and bending at the elbow, until you feel a good stretch in the front of the right shoulder.

At the same time, push the left hand forward, palm facing forward until you lock the elbow and feel a good stretch in the back of the left shoulder blade. Turn the head so that it looks back along the right elbow. Only stretch as far as is completely comfortable. Keep the shoulders down. Feel a good stretch at the waist area. Exhale and inhale again.

Exhaling, turn back to the front as you draw the palms back to the starting position with the palms at heart level, fingers pointing up. Relax completely and let go of all tension in the neck and shoulders. Inhaling repeat on the other side, left hand back and right hand forward, looking past left elbow. Exhale and inhale again. Exhale as you come back to the front again. Repeat this exercise two to three times per day doing as many in a row as feels good. If you do a lot of sitting work, make sure to do at least one of these exercises every hour or so to keep the energy flowing.

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