

Qi Gong and Lower Back Pain

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Lower back pain is a very common problem for many people and can range from mild occasional discomfort to chronic and debilitating agony. Some people injure themselves and know why their back hurts, others just wake up one day and there it is. Chiropractic and MD visits can be very helpful for improving the situation but sometimes there is an underlying energy imbalance that needs correcting for lasting progress.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) cannot prevent people from injuring themselves. What it can do is help the body to repair and heal itself by correcting underlying weaknesses that hinder new cell growth. Problems with pain in the lower back often indicate an imbalance in the Kidney energy.

Kidney energy is considered the root of all other energy in the body. It governs all of the body's growth and development from conception through the aging process. In effect, you could say that the natural diminishing of the Kidney energy over time is what actually causes the human body to age. Building and conserving Kidney energy delay the aging process and increase longevity. Some very common drains on Kidney energy that many people unknowingly participate in are not sleeping enough, working too many hours, and not drinking enough water. Also smoking of any kind and drinking caffeinated beverages place an additional strain on the Kidney energy.

Other problems that relate to Kidney energy and may occur concurrently with lower back pain are pain in the knees, ankles, feet, heels, bone spurs, bone density problems, dental problems, frequent urination or incontinence, ringing in the ears, hearing problems, low libido, impotence, fertility problems, coldness

in the hands and feet, shortness of breath, and coughing or wheezing. Emotionally, when the Kidney energy is out of balance people can feel "frozen" or fearful. Sometimes depression relates to the Kidney energy as well (although this type of depression usually starts very young, before puberty, or is inherited from a parent.)

Building and conserving Kidney energy has been a highly scrutinized topic in TCM and Chinese martial arts as well as Qi Gong training because of its relation to longevity. Over thousands of years of research, many exercises and meditations have been created to lengthen the life and increase the quality of life as well as heal the body. The Dantian Meditation covered in my article on asthma in the February, 2004 issue of *New Health Digest* would be very helpful for building Kidney energy. I suggest you combine The Dantian Meditation with the exercise I give you below. You can find a reprint of that article on my web page at www.qigongrochester.com.

The following Qi Gong exercise is from a very ancient set called the Eight Pieces of Brocade Qi Gong. It was created by a very famous and honorable commander of the Southern Sung Dynasty army, Marshal Fei Yeuh (1103-1142 AD). He was a great warrior, even at a young age, and he created this form to heal and strengthen his soldiers for battle. Today this exercise is still done all over the world to help people heal and strengthen their bodies for the stresses of our day and age. I like this exercise in particular for lower back problems because it can be adjusted and adapted according to how your back is feeling that day. If you are having a particularly painful day, you can skip the back bend and just move the arms and do the visualization. *You can even just do the visualization lying down until you feel strong enough to get up and move!*

Eight Pieces of Brocade (#6)

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and your arms relaxed by your sides. Turn the palms up and inhale as you raise them up to chest level. Rotate your palms toward your chest then down and continue rotating out and up until your palms face the

ceiling with the fingers pointing toward each other. Exhale and press both your hands up toward ceiling. Imagine you are pushing against ceiling, fingers toward each other. Keep your chin down slightly and relaxed and your knees slightly bent.

Breathe normally and focus your attention on the spine opposite from belly button just below the surface of the skin. This point is called the Mingmen point which means "life door." Pause for a moment and imagine this point warming up or a bright shining ball of energy centered there. Then bend forward at your waist and hold both your legs behind the knees. Now focus your attention on the ball of each foot. This point is called Yong Chuan which means "bubbling well." Pause for a moment and imagine this point warming up as you did the first point, Mingmen.

Now, straighten back up slowly by bending your knees first and bringing your hips underneath you before straightening your back. This helps to reduce the strain on your lower back as you straighten up. Let your arms relax by your sides. If you have low back pain and bending over makes it worse, you can skip the part where you bend at the waist. When you get to the part where you lower your hands, just place your palms against the back of your hips or thighs and continue with the visualization of the points on the feet. Once your back is feeling better you can include the waist bend. Repeat this exercise two to three times per day, doing as many repetitions in a row as feels good without causing any strain.