

Health is the Fruition of Growing Your Energy

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The Three Treasures of Traditional Chinese Medicine are known as Jing, Qi, and Shen. You can think about each of these as

aspects of how our energy manifests in our bodies, as if our energy had three faces. They are dependent on each other and an abundance of one will transform into the other two. Jing, stored in the kidneys, represents the deep stored energy that we inherit at conception from our parents and governs all our growth and development as well as the aging process.

Qi, stored in the belly, is the vital energy that flows through our bodies, motivating and enlivening all our activities.

Shen, stored in the heart, represents our spiritual energy, the light that shines out of our eyes, and inspires us to make a difference in our own lives and the lives of others.

The easiest of these Three Treasures to grow is Qi. Qi Gong literally means Qi cultivation. The best way to build Qi in the body is to sit still and meditate. To build Qi, we meditate with our mind focused on the belly. To be specific, the exact location is an inch and a half down from the belly button and centered inside the body. This area is called the Dantian which means "elixir field" or "energy field." The word used for field here indicates an agricultural field where crops are grown and cultivated. When we meditate on the Dantian, we are growing Qi like a farmer growing crops.

When the Qi is strong, it will flow forcefully throughout the body, clearing out blockages and healing every cell. Another important result of building Qi in the Dantian is, as I

mentioned above, it will transform into Jing to lengthen our lives. The fact that this Jing is stored in the kidneys becomes an important point when we consider the breathing for this meditation.

The diaphragm is a muscle that moves to draw breath in and out of the body. It attaches to the lower part of the rib cage in such a way that it is higher in the front and lower in the back, just like the rib cage is. Toward the back of the rib cage, the diaphragm actually lies right above the adrenal glands and kidneys. Every time the diaphragm moves with the breathing process, it massages the kidneys. Since the kidneys are the residence for Jing, abdominal breathing actually increases our longevity.

I remember seeing evidence relating to the power of abdominal breathing when I was a high school student. We connected a machine that measured brain waves (EEG) to several students. You could clearly see the shift in the brain waves from the frantic beta rhythm, associated with stress, to a gentle alpha rhythm, associated with the relaxation response, when the students began abdominal breathing.

When breathing abdominally, each inhale and exhale should be even and smooth. The abdomen should move with the breath instead of the shoulders and chest. As you inhale, the diaphragm should drop down and the belly should expand. As you exhale, the diaphragm relaxes back up and the belly should relax back in naturally. Human beings are born to breathe this way and if you watch a baby breathe, you'll see their little bellies moving quite naturally without any effort. With regular practice, abdominal breathing will become your natural way of breathing all day long without any effort as well. To do the Dantian meditation, sit with your hands on your lap, palm down or

facing your belly. Do not interlace your fingers, though. Feet flat on the floor, knees at a 90 degree angle. Keep your back straight and relaxed. Shoulders should be relaxed and chin in slightly. The arch in your lower back should be flattened slightly as well. The teeth are together without clenching the jaw. Touch the tip of your tongue to the roof of your mouth unless you have high blood pressure. If you have high blood pressure, place the tip of your tongue behind your bottom teeth inside your mouth. Put your mind on the Dantian which is about 1 1/2" below the belly button and centered inside the body. Breathe slowly and smoothly. Picture that the air goes all the way down to the Dantian. As you inhale, the belly expands, as you exhale the belly sinks back in naturally. Picture the coals of a fire glowing brightly deep in your belly. Imagine each breath you take is blowing on these coals making them brighter and warmer.

Continue this meditation for as long as is comfortable. You'll know that you are done if you feel like you need to get up and move around. Your mind will wander, but this is normal. Try not to be distracted by the thoughts that arise. Just let them go. The trick is not to create an entire conversation in your head. For example, when you remember you forgot to go to the grocery store, don't start planning what you'll get for dinner, just tell yourself you'll take care of it in a few more minutes.

Many people feel like they shouldn't bother meditating because they never can find an hour to set aside. Instead, try finding a few moments between tasks at work and home where you can tune into the Dantian and just breathe. A few minutes of Dantian meditation every day can make a huge difference in your health and wellness.