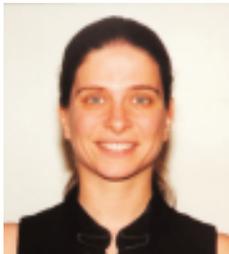


Healing with Qi Gong — Finding Freedom from Anxiety

By Lisa O'Shea

Published in *New Health Digest*, July/August 2003 issue



Lisa O'Shea

Stress comes in all shapes and sizes. There may be physical tension in muscles, an uneasy restlessness in the mind or a debilitating anxiety. Those who suffer with anxiety often

describe it as a worried feeling when they don't even know what they're worried about or pressure in the chest, shortness of breath, the heart itself noticeably thumping, or spontaneous sweating.

Western Medicine focuses on treating anxiety with pharmaceuticals that target different aspects of brain chemistry. This can be very helpful for certain individuals. However, for many people this isn't enough to clear the problem.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) takes a different angle on treating anxiety that can safely and effectively be used in conjunction with Western Medicine. In TCM the mind is considered to reside within the heart, not in the grey matter of the brain. When the mind gets agitated, the heart energy will get agitated; hence many of the symptoms associated with anxiety occur in the chest. To treat anxiety according to TCM it is necessary to calm and balance the heart.

Research has shown that a strong and controlled mind can regulate brain activity. In Qi Gong (Chinese energy cultivation) the approach is to awaken and strengthen personal control of mind energy. In this article I will describe some simple Qi Gong techniques that you can use at home to help nurture the heart energy.

First lets talk about lifestyles. The heart is the most sensitive organ with relation to emotions. For the heart to remain balanced it needs to be kept peaceful and protected. There are three emotional states that have a long term detrimental effect on the heart energy:

impatience, hastiness, and cruelty. A lifestyle that is based on a hectic pace of activity will constantly be at odds with reducing anxiety. TCM maintains that exposure to cruel or threatening situations, whether it is drama TV and movies, actual news reports or personal relationships can raise stress levels and induce anxiety. These seemingly passive influences can undermine your heart energy.

What you eat is also an important aspect of a lifestyle. Taking stimulants such as caffeine interferes with your body's ability to naturally regulate activity. Read the labels and avoid added caffeine, coffee, tea, or chocolate. Even decaffeinated tea and coffee products should be avoided as well. Over consumption of foods with a bitter flavor can lead to trouble with heart energy.

A very helpful Qi Gong exercise for anxiety called the Heart Sound. It is from a very ancient set of exercises called the Six Healing Sounds that dates back to the 7th century B.C. To begin the Heart Sound, place your palms facing up on your lap, elbows out slightly and away from your body. There should be a small amount of space under your armpits, like you are holding a ping pong ball there. Keep your back straight and relaxed and your chin in slightly. You can have your eyes closed or opened slightly.

Begin the posture by bringing your hands out from the sides of the body. Stretch them out as far as they will go while keeping the elbows bent slightly and the shoulders relaxed. Continue to raise the hands up until they meet over the head. Interlock the fingers and turn the palms over to face the ceiling. Bring the left shoulder up and lower the right shoulder, leaning to the right side. This should allow you to feel a gentle pulling on the left side of your body where your heart is in your chest.

Exhale and make the following sound "Haaaaw" from the back of your throat. The sound is as if you were going to say "haw" but you just blow out while

your mouth is shaping the word. As you exhale, feel the negative emotion of hastiness, impatience, anxiety, or cruelty leave your heart. Pick whichever one of

these emotional states makes sense for you right at that moment. After you have finished the sound, straighten up and relax. Breathing normally, release your hands, turn them palms down and lower them slowly in front of your body back down to your lap and place them palms up on your lap. Relax and feel the positive emotion of peace, love, sincerity, or honesty grow in your heart, whichever one you feel most connected to right then. Relax as long as you want and repeat. Do as many repetitions as feels comfortable and repeat this exercise twice a day.

There also is an energy point, called Lao Gong, on the hand that is very helpful with anxiety. To find this point, close your fingers into a fist. The point is located where your middle finger touches your palm. To reduce anxiety, gently touch this spot on your palm (either hand) and breath evenly. Try circling on the point very slowly, the slower you circle, the quieter your mind will become. Hold this point several times a day to help lower your anxiety level. This point is especially good to use if you wake up during the night or early morning and your mind starts racing.

Qi Gong is a method for creating change within your body by improving energy circulation. The exercises help train your energy to flow properly and should always be done in a relaxed and comfortable manner. Qi Gong can be safely used right along with your doctor's advice and treatments to help calm the mind and ease trouble with anxiety.



Heart Sound
"Haaw"
(lean to the right)