Therapies

Acupuncture | Art Therapy | Counselling | Healing Imagery | Massage | Meditation and Mindfulness Music Therapy | Nordic Walking | Physical Activity Qigong | Reflexology | Relaxation | Shiatsu | Yoga
Qigong is a Chinese practice that combines gentle movements, breathing techniques and meditation to improve the flow of Qi energy through the body. Qigong is offered by trained instructors to help with physical, psychological and spiritual health.

In the context of cancer, recent research suggests that Qigong may be beneficial for quality of life, fatigue and biological outcomes, such as inflammation and immune responses. Whilst more high quality research is needed, Qigong is considered a safe and gentle activity that may be beneficial for people with cancer.

What do people who have tried Qigong say about it?
Research studies known as qualitative studies ask people about their experiences. They can provide information from a personal perspective, but can’t tell us if a therapy is likely to work for everyone.

We did not find any studies that asked people about their experiences of Qigong.

Information on Qigong
This evidence-based information sheet aims to provide clearly sourced and reliable information to help you make informed choices about Qigong, one of a range of complementary therapies available to support people with cancer. If you would like more information on how to access the range of services Penny Brohn UK provides, please contact our Helpline on 0303 3000 118. We are able to provide our services free of charge, thanks to the charitable donations and voluntary contributions which fund our work.

More about Qigong
Qigong (pronounced chee gung) is an ancient practice from Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). Qigong practice combines gentle movements, meditation and breathing techniques to achieve optimal health and wellbeing. There is also a form of Qigong called ‘external Qigong’, which is performed by a trained therapist to emit ‘Qi’ energy to the patient and promote healing of various ailments and diseases.

The concept of ‘Qi’ energy is fundamental to Qigong philosophy. In traditional Chinese culture, Qi is regarded as the life force energy that flows through all living things. Disease states occur when the flow of Qi becomes blocked or unbalanced. Qigong is thought to improve the balance of Qi in the body and is practised by millions of people worldwide to treat a variety of physical illnesses and to promote psychological and spiritual wellbeing.

Although the idea of Qi energy is a popular belief, it has not been measured or explained scientifically. It is not necessary to believe in the concept of Qi in order to practise Qigong.

Is Qigong safe?
There are no reports within the literature of adverse effects associated with Qigong. It is essential that medical circumstances are discussed with the teacher before attending a class.

Practitioner perspective
“Qigong is an ancient Chinese practice that supports the body’s internal energy through a range of seated, standing and moving exercises and meditations. As internal strength and energy increase, people notice many benefits, often starting with improvements in health.

Qigong practice promotes awareness and increases perception, giving us more control over many aspects of life. At this level, Qigong can be used to support artistic and spiritual development, as well as being used for developing physical strength and health.”

What happens in an Qigong session?
- Qigong sessions usually last between 20 minutes and an hour. Teachers may vary greatly in terms of training and experience and it is important to find a teacher who is experienced at teaching those with cancer.
- Sessions involve fluid, rhythmic movements of the body, similar to those practiced in Tai Chi. Poses may also be held for short periods of time.
- The teacher will ask participants to focus on their breathing and may encourage visualisation, for example visualising the flow of Qi around the body.

Qigong and The Bristol Whole Life Approach
This adaptation of The Bristol Whole Life Approach wheel shows the areas that Qigong can help with, according to providers. (Please note that these are not the claims of Penny Brohn UK.)
Are there any legal issues?
In the UK it is illegal for a practitioner to claim Qigong can cure cancer. However the professional practice of Qigong is not regulated by law and there are no reputable organisations in the UK that train and certify Qigong practitioners/therapists.

What is the evidence on Qigong?
Research suggests that Qigong may be beneficial for quality of life, fatigue, immune function and inflammation. However, almost all studies of Qigong in cancer care have methodological weaknesses and are at risk of bias. More high quality research is needed.

A full list of references and an extended summary of the research literature is available upon request from our Helpline.

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Organisations that offer support and information for people with cancer
Cancer Research UK
Tel: 0808 800 4040
www.cancerresearchuk.org

Macmillan Cancer Support
Tel: 0808 808 0000
www.macmillan.org.uk

NHS 111
Tel: 111
www.nhs.uk

More information on complementary therapies
NHS Evidence
www.evidence.nhs.uk
CAM Cancer
www.cam-cancer.org/CAM-Summaries

Organisations that represent qigong
British Health Qigong Association
www.healthqigong.org.uk
Health Qigong Federation UK
www.healthqigong.net