



Qigong and Stress Resistance

Introduction:

I will start by exploring what stress is and the negative affects of stress. Then I shall demonstrate why Qigong is such a powerful tool for overcoming the negative affects of stress and for increasing your resistance to stress by referencing where possible scientific study findings.

You see, I don't believe that stress is bad or that you can get rid of stress. Stress can help you to focus, to exceed your own expectations; it can be a push to improve your life.

Stress is a sign of life and you can't get rid of it, but Qigong is a powerful tool that can help you avoid being overwhelmed by it.

The Problem:

There is no denying the fact that the world and everybody in it is experiencing a number of major challenges – economical, environmental and ecological.

The result is that an increasing number of us find ourselves having to manage increasing levels of stress on a daily basis. How many of us have been directly affected by the death of a friend or loved one, work overload, legal problems, relationship concerns, increased worries about job security, being able to meet financial commitments and debt management?

I first became aware of the harmful affects of stress many years ago when I was training for my advanced diploma in counselling.



Stress is like a runaway train bearing down on you, if you can't step out of its way, the results can be devastating, not only to you and your health but to your family and friends as well.

George Chrousos, M.D., of the National Institute of Child Health and Development has studied stress and describes the problem this way:

"A threat to your life or safety that triggers a primal physical, response from the body, leaving your breathless, heart pounding and mind racing.

From deep within your brain, a chemical signal speeds stress hormones through the blood stream, priming your body to be alert and escape from danger. Concentration becomes more focused, reactions become faster and strength and agility increase.

When the stressful situation ends, hormonal signals switch off the stress response and your body returns to normal."

You'll recognise this as the 'Fight or Flight' syndrome that our ancient ancestors used to avoid real life or death situations.

When our ancestor heard the roar and the rushing of foot prints heading through the bushes towards him stress hormones filled his body and he was ready to fight to the death or do whatever was necessary to escape the threat on his life.

Compare this with a situation we might face. Your boss announces to you that your performance is not up to scratch, or that the company needs to streamline and you're in the firing line. What happens?

As the stress hormones fill your body, do you leap over your bosses desk and tear him limb from limb? Do you run out of the office, leap out of the first floor window and keep going until you reach safety?

No, you stand there and take it and the powerfully toxic 'stress cocktail' doesn't get used up.

The problem we face today is that instead of only feeling stress only when a real life or death situation is happening, we feel stress about events that are completely out of our control, about events that haven't even happened yet and even about events that may never come to pass.

Many of us constantly stress about financial problems, personal relationships, job performance and the future. These are not life or death events that need to be dealt with right now. But they still evoke the same stress response that George Chrousos mentions above.



The result is that the hormonal signals that turn off the stress response never arrive and the toxic stress cocktail stays in our bloodstream, tissues or organs.

Here are some of the negative affects this creates:

- Cortisol – one of the stress hormones – at continued high levels increases the appetite which in turn leads to increased weight. A common feature of people under stress is over eating and leads to many serious health problems. Because cortisol turns off your disease fighting white blood cells this can 'leave the door open' to a range of serious health problems.
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- By restricting the release of stomach acid stress hormones are responsible for many digestive problems.
- Stress has a negative affect on the sexual reproduction system. Interfering with the production of the sex hormones testosterone, estrogen and progesterone.
- Continued exposure to stress weakens the immune system which lowers your resistance to coughs, colds, infections and fatigue.

All of which can lead to serious health problems.

Stress related emotional problems are even worse. Chronic stress can result in melancholic depression, because the fight or flight mechanism is prevented from being turned off the result is constant anxiety and over reaction to stimulation. Hallmarks of this form of depression are anxiety, loss of appetite, loss of sex drive, rapid heart beat, high blood pressure, high cholesterol and triglyceride levels.

Whilst anxiety is a normal reaction to stress, constant and repeated exposure can result in difficulty controlling it:

- 55 million US adults experience an anxiety disorder in a 12 months period. [1]
- 29 million have mood disorders.
- 10.7 million suffer from post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).
- In 2007 over 34, 000 Americans committed suicide.

A new study showed that chronic pain, often related to stress – is experienced by 100 million Americans at a cost of around \$600 billion a year in medical treatments and lost productivity – according to a report from the Institute of Medicine (IOM June 2011)

\$300 billion, or \$7,500 per employee, is spent annually in the U.S. on stress-related compensation claims, reduced productivity, absenteeism, health insurance costs, direct medical expenses (nearly 50% higher for workers who report stress), and employee turnover. (Source: Centers for Disease Control and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health who are dedicated to studying stress)

The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work reported that over half of the 550 million working days lost annually in the U.S. from absenteeism are stress related

It is clear that stress can cause very serious problems. We need to take steps to increase our resistance to it or face the consequences.

The Solution:

Qigong has been shown to be a powerful antidote to the affects caused by stress and for increasing our resistance to stress.

Most Qigong consists of gentle external movements, co-ordinated with the breathing and performed in a meditative state of mind.

Qigong is the art of deliberately managing your vital energy. In a nutshell vital energy (or Qi) is what keeps you alive and allows you to do everything you do.

Qigong is similar to Yoga, but less strenuous, it's like Tai Chi but easier to learn and it requires virtually zero athleticism.

The foundational philosophy of Qigong is Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). TCM has been responsible for keeping one of the largest populations on the planet, with one of the longest series of continual records and a high level of culture – healthy, happy and well – for thousands of years.



Here are just a few achievements of TCM that were far in advance of western medicine:

- William Harvey is famous for having accurately described how blood circulates around the body. 2500 years before William Harvey the *Inner Classic of Medicine* (Zhou Dynasty 1027 – 256 BC) described how blood flow in the human body moved in a never ending circle.
- Hua Tuo (208-118BC) – a physician was probably the first person known in the world to apply anaesthesia in surgery, about 2000 years ahead of the West.
- The Chinese were the first to produce a governmental pharmacopeia, commissioned by the Tang government – in 657 – more than 800 years before the *Florentine Nuovo Receptaris*, which is the first Western pharmacopeia.
- Surgery reached an exceedingly high level during the Tang dynasty. “*Magical Inherited Formulae*” by Gong Qing Xuan, despite its supernatural name, provided many rational and effective methods as remedies for gangrene and various skin diseases, stoppage of bleeding and elimination of pain, treatment for shock and detoxification of poisons. It is probably the world’s earliest book that specialises on surgery.
- In ophthalmology, it is awe-inspiring to learn that more than a 1000 years ago, the Chinese already performed successful operations on the eyes to extract excessive fluid!

- The Tang government established the Imperial School of Medicine, which was earlier than the first medical school in the West at Salerno by 200 years.
- The Chinese have always considered preventative medicine as superior to healing. In the *Nei Ching* it is written: "The inferior physician treats disease, the superior physician teaches the well to remain well".

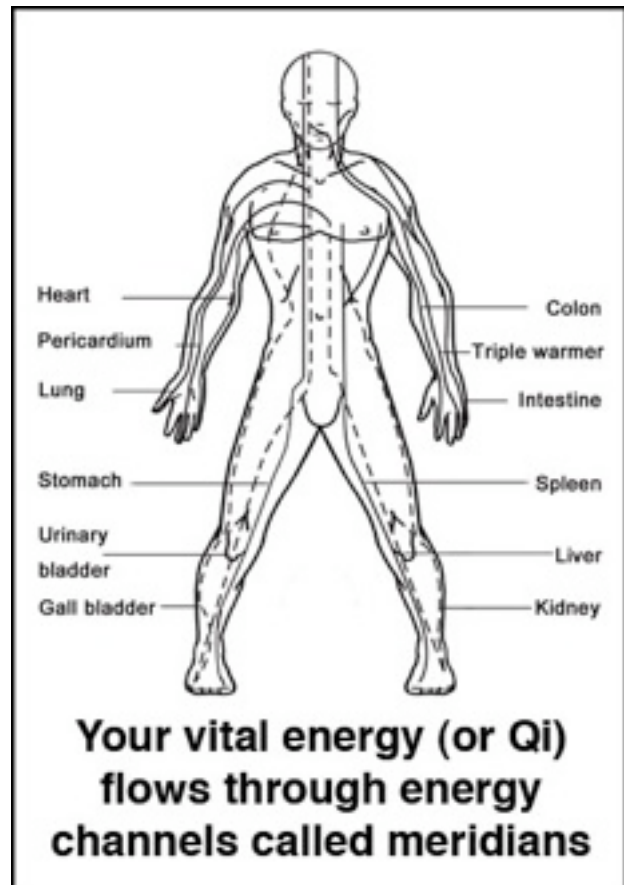
How does Qigong counteract the destructive effects of high cortisol levels in the blood stream?

From the TCM viewpoint there is only 1 illness. Regardless of the physical, emotional or mental symptoms, it comes down to a lack of harmonious energy flow through the energy channels (meridians) of your body.

Because your physical, emotional and mental health is the result of harmonious energy flow, anything that affects this harmonious flow will impact your whole experience of life. This is why it is important to learn how to manage your own energy system.

Qigong is a simple, direct & effective way to manage your vital energy

The following comments reflect the impressions and conclusions of Kenneth M. Sancier, Ph.D. in a scientific report, "Medical Applications of Qigong", published by Alternative Therapies in January 1996:



- **Stroke and Mortality Rates Decrease** - in a study of hypertensive patients, the mortality rate in the Qigong group was nearly half of the group who did not practice Qigong.
- **Blood Pressure Stabilizes** - Over a 20 year period, blood pressure of the Qigong group stabilized, whereas that of the control group increased.
- **Sex Hormone Levels Improve** - Estrogen imbalances "can be reversed by Qigong exercise"

- **Blood flow To Brain Increases.** Memory Improves, Insomnia, Numbness, Vertigo, Headaches, and Cholesterol Decrease - Two studies show Qigong increases blood flow to the brain.
- **Alpha Brain Waves Increase** - Alpha brain waves are the key to stress relief, health, vitality and longevity.

"The main conclusion from many studies is that Qigong enables the body to heal itself" - Almost everyone can learn Qigong exercises for maintaining health and self healing.

Other comments on Qigong:

- Qi-training improves anxiety and has a significant effect on the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis. – Myeong Soo Lee et al – Effects of Qi training on anxiety and plasma concentrations of cortisol, ACTH and aldosterone. Stress and Health 20(5):243-248. Aug 2004.
- Qigong was shown to be a promising alternative intervention for elderly people with depression and with chronic physical illness to improve their biopsychosocial health and possibly reduce their suicide rate. The improvement from Qigong practice included feeling more relaxed, more comfortable, better sleep and being more optimistic. All of these reported improvements in psychosocial functioning are indicative of less depressed mood and improved quality of life. - H.W.H. Tsang. (2003). Qigong and suicide prevention. The British Journal of Psychiatry 182: 266-267.

Qigong consists of three core skills. It is these skills that distinguish Qigong from gentle exercise:

- **Entering a Qigong State of Mind** - You learn how to attain a higher state of consciousness, demonstrated by being relaxed and focused. This skill alone allows you to relax physically, emotionally and mentally like never before.
- **Energy Flow** – more poetically known as Flowing Breeze, Swaying Willows. This happens when you are totally relaxed and your energy (Qi) flow inside makes your body sway gently. For centuries this has been a closely guarded, jealously kept secret of an elite few. As a result it is very rare to find this skill taught in most Qigong today.
- **Standing Meditation** - Many people in the West today mistakenly believe that the only way to meditate effectively is in the seated Lotus position. For beginners, the physical discomfort commonly experienced in this position makes it difficult to achieve mental stillness. Standing Meditation allows you to access the benefits of meditation quickly and effectively.

Meditation dramatically lowers stress and stress related physical and emotional problems, say research scientists in thousands of studies...

- The National Institute of Health reports that regular meditation can reduce chronic pain, anxiety, high blood pressure, cholesterol, substance abuse, post traumatic stress response and blood levels of stress hormones.
- Frank Treiber, Ph.D., of the Medical College of Georgia, says that meditation lowers blood pressure, even for healthy young people, creating a 12.5% lower risk of stroke or coronary mortality in adulthood.
- Researchers at University of Maryland School of Medicine report meditation relieved stress, reduced rheumatoid arthritis symptoms, reduced cardiovascular risk factors, decreased psychological distress, improved sleep patterns.
- Studies at University of Toronto, Oxford University and Cambridge University found that 66% of those recovering from depression who meditated remained stable (no relapse) over a year.
- Dr Herbert Benson of Harvard Medical School found that mediation releases tension, creates the will power and consciousness to be in control of one's life, and alleviates depression, loneliness, hopelessness and despair.
- Dr Adrian White, University of Exeter reported that meditators showed increased activity in the frontal part of the brain associated with lower anxiety and a more positive emotional state.

Meditation has a dramatic and positive effect on stress and the physical and emotional problems caused by stress, but nowhere near as dramatically as Qigong.

Dr. Sancier referenced two studies that show alpha brain waves dominate beta waves and spread to the frontal areas of the brain during Qigong practice.

One study found differences between the practice of Zen and the practice of Qigong. Dr. Sancier writes, "According to Kawano and Wang, these differences in brain function suggest that Qigong is a semiconscious process that involves some awareness and activity, whereas Zen meditation is a



process that releases the meditator from all concerns. Perhaps because of this difference, Qigong is considered a healing art, whereas Zen is generally not."

Every time you practice Qigong you are also practising (and get the benefits of) meditation, but as Dr Sacier comment above demonstrates Qigong is so much more than meditation. This is one reason why long term Qigong practitioners are largely unaffected by stressful situations.

Conclusion:

Understand this: *stress is a sign of life*. Whilst I don't believe it is possible or healthy to live a stress free life it is possible to increase your resistance to stress and learning how to calm the mind is scientifically proven to help you reduce stress, anxiety and worry.

The world does not change when you learn Qigong, things will still happen to you that you'd rather didn't and sometimes people will still behave towards you in ways you don't deserve.

No, the world doesn't change after practising Qigong, something even better happens. You change for the better.

There is a science behind Qigong. Scientific laws that govern whether you are - healthy or ill, energised or tired, articulate or confused, happy or sad - and they are just as exact as those that govern our universe. Learn to use them and you will be happy, healthy, energised, articulate and better at everything you choose to focus on, just as certainly as the force of gravity holds you to the earth.

When I first encountered the research in this article about the effects of Qigong and meditation on stress and stress induced physical and emotional problems, I knew it was important that you know about it, and that I offer you a solution to this problem.

You see most people will never know that they can learn how to be happy, healthy and full of vitality and that it is no more difficult than learning how to brush your teeth.

Please learn how to apply Qigong to "stress proof" your life during these stressful times. Given the darkening world situation, we all need to become more resilient, more stress-resistant.

There is a saying that '*into every life a little rain must fall*', think of Qigong as your giant golfing umbrella!

Bye for now



Marcus Santer

Author Bio:



Marcus Santer is the author of '**Shaolin Chi Kung – 18 Exercises To Help You Live A Longer, Healthier & Happier Life**', you can download the first 20 pages for free at: <http://shaolinchikungbook.com>

Marcus is the founder and chief instructor at Qigong15. He's been practising Qigong (properly) since 2000 and teaching since 2003.

"My mission is to make Qigong as popular as Yoga, Tai Chi, and meditation, because I believe it is quicker and easier to learn, less physically demanding and practiced properly gives better results than Yoga, Tai Chi and meditation combined."

For over 400 articles on all aspects of Qigong, please visit his blog at: <http://Qigong15.com/blog/>

[1] These figures are calculated using percentages attained from the National Institute of Mental Health and applying them to the 307, 006, 550 population of the USA – source 2009 US Census Bureau.