

# Chinese Health Balls: For Balancing Yin-Yang and Restoring Chi

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Chinese Health Balls can be extremely effective for helping you to achieve mental, physical and spiritual wholeness. Their origin can be traced back to the Han Dynasty (A.D. 26-220) when training for combat included rotating walnuts with the fingertips, and maneuvering them in the palms of the hands in order to strengthen the muscles of the upper extremities. During the Sung Dynasty (960-1279), balls made of stone and metal were used, thereby creating a more effective tool than its predecessor.

Chinese health balls were noted for their healing benefits during the Qing Dynasty (1736-1799) when Emperor Qianlong's physician prescribed daily practise with health balls. Because he was so impressed with the benefits he received from using the health balls, the Emperor cultivated their usage into an art form. Qianlong was the longest reigning Emperor in the history of China, a factor that added to the credibility and allure of this art form.

As the popularity of health balls became widespread, so did the belief that their usage reaped magical powers that would enhance performance. This led to the manufacture of a smaller ball with a tin spring that was incorporated into the hollow ball. When the balls were shaken, they produced enchanting sounds!

According to Chinese philosophy, every living thing in the universe consists of the energy chi that is composed of two inseparable forces, yin and yang. Yin represents the intuitive, emotional and physical characteristics, while yang represents the intellectual, energetic and spiritual ones. The balance of yin and yang in a healthy person is shown as the order and harmony of chi among the bodily organs and between the main and collateral energy-passing channels called meridians.

Through the aging process, the chi within begins to deteriorate, leaving us vulnerable to a host of psychological and physical ailments. In time, the body loses its ability to repair itself. The purpose of exercising with Chinese health balls is to obtain and maintain a state of optimum health through the stimulation of acupuncture or reflex points in the body. These reflex points have a function similar to resistors in an electrical circuit (meridians), and massaging the points on a meridian affects the speed and force of the flow of chi.

When chi flows throughout the body, it promotes healing and rejuvenation, helps prevent heart and lung disease, strengthens the cardiovascular system, makes the body resistant to injury, cures insomnia and promotes clarity as well as concentration and memory. As channels of disharmony become un-blocked, the internal organs are nourished and the body's equilibrium is restored.

Health balls come in a variety of sizes, weights, makes and designs. They are relatively inexpensive and can be purchased at health stores or gift shops. Generally, the larger and heavier they are, the stronger the effect on the reflex points. The heat that is released from the balls promotes circulation and has a calming effect on the nervous system. Health balls are easy to use, though they might seem a bit awkward at first. Following the tips and warm-up exercises below will help the novice to familiarize themselves with the sound and feel of the balls.

## **Practise Tips**

Always practise in a safe place, preferably on a carpeted or well-padded area to avoid damage to the health balls if they should be dropped. When first starting out, it is advisable to work with smaller-sized balls. Limit beginning sessions to 30 minutes; otherwise, reflex points will become over stimulated and could create cramping and soreness. Be sure to do the warm-ups and exercises several times. Where applicable, repeat the movements on both the right and left sides.

## **Hand and Foot Warm-up**

Rub both hands together vigorously until they feel warm and tingly. Interlace the fingertips, then bend the wrists away from the body (palms face outward) and stretch the arms. Make fists with the hands keeping the thumbs against the palms, stretch the hands and make fists again. Rub the soles, tops and sides of the feet with the palms of the hands. Rotate the ankles inward and outward in circular motions.

## **Hand Exercises to Get the Ball Rolling**

There are many reflex points located on the hands and feet. The following exercises will get the ball of chi rolling.

- Place a ball in the hand. Cup it lightly, and then rotate the ball with the fingers, first in a clockwise, then counterclockwise direction.

- With two balls in the palm of the hand, rotate them around each other with the fingers, this time counterclockwise, then clockwise.

- Place a ball in the palm of the hand. Move it with the thumb to the base of the baby finger, then the ring, middle, and index fingers successively. Now reverse the order and go back to the baby finger again. Let the ball roll back into the palm and repeat.

- Place two balls in the palm of the hand and cup it lightly with the fingers. Flip one ball over the other with a flicking motion of the thumb.

- Grasp a ball between the thumb and index finger. Alternate grasping the ball between the thumb and middle finger, thumb and ring finger and thumb and baby finger; then reverse the order and go back to the thumb and index finger again.

- Hold a ball in the palm of the hand. With a slight downward tilting motion of the wrist, roll the ball to base of the fingers. Now slowly move the ball to the fingertips without dropping it. Then tilt the hand slightly upward and let the ball roll back into the palm of the hand.

#### **Feet Exercises - One Ball**

These exercises improve the blood circulation in the feet and legs, strengthen the muscles of the feet and produce better co-ordination as well as balance.

Place a mat on the floor so that the balls do not roll around. Sit comfortably on an elevated surface with the feet just touching the floor and the thighs parallel to the floor. Place one ball under the foot, and roll the ball forward to the toes, then backward to the heel. Now rotate the ball in circular motions from the toe to heel and back again.

#### **Feet Exercises - Two Balls**

- Place two balls under the arch of the foot, then roll them forward and backward. The balls should remain touching each other.

- Place one ball under the ball of the foot and the other under the heel. Make circular rotations with both balls.

- Place two balls against the inside of one foot, then massage the side of the foot using the sole of the other foot to move the balls back and forth.

#### **Sound and Rhythm Exercises**

The sound produced by shaking or rotating the health balls has a relaxing, mesmerizing, yet stimulating effect.

- Grasp a health ball in each hand; shake them rhythmically to create a melody. Try shaking two balls in one hand to increase the effect.

- Hold a ball in the palm of the hand, palm upward. Toss the ball in the air and catch it. Try various heights and speeds. Notice the sounds produced.

- With a ball in the palm of each hand, alternate tossing the balls in the air and catching them

#### **Walking Exercises**

The walking exercises require health balls that chime. As you walk along, concentrate on the melodious sounds produced.

- Hold a ball in the palm of the hand. As you walk, toss the ball back and forth from one hand to the other hand.

- Hold a ball in the fingertips of each hand. Step forward bringing the hands in front of the dan tien (2-3 inches below the navel) and gently tap the balls against each other. With the hands situated near the dan tien, tap the balls together keeping in tune with each step.

- Hold a ball in the fingertips of each hand. The arms hang loosely at the sides. As you walk, rotate the balls with the fingertips.

- Other variations include swinging the arms forward at the same time while rotating the balls; as the arms swing in front, cross them at the wrists; then swing the arms alternately back and forth.

#### **Shau-Gong - Balancing Chi**

This movement should be performed at the end of the work out, because it balances and calms down the chi.

- Sit comfortably in a chair. Feet are parallel, shoulder-width apart, knees are relaxed. Cup two health balls, one in each palm of the hand with the thumbs placed over the tops of the balls to lock them in place. Place palms facing inward in front of the dan tien. Fingertips are a few inches apart. While inhaling, lift both hands to the chest. When the hands reach chest height, turn the palms over to face downward. Exhale and lower the hands to the dan tien. Turn the palms inward and repeat several times.

Chinese health ball exercises help boost the flow of chi. By practising daily; you can accomplish mastery of self, thus, reaping the benefits of good physical, mental and spiritual health.

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