

# Mental Qigong meditation can be just as rewarding as its physical cousin

April 27 2017, by Melissa Cochrane

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In recent decades, modern scientific techniques have fully documented the health benefits of the ancient meditation technique of Qigong. One example of physical Qigong is the technique Wu Qin Xi (five animals play), in which participants sequentially move through poses that represent the form of different animals, holding each pose for several minutes. During each phase individuals seek to regulate their breathing and quiet their minds. Although this is a challenging endeavor, the benefits are significant. Effective Qigong practice can reduce feelings of depression and anxiety, decrease blood pressure and increase feelings of relaxation and attention.

While these benefits of Qigong are well known, some people are not physically able to practice the [technique](#). This would include some elderly people, as well as those with temporarily limited mobility due to an injury. In addition, there are certain circumstances that are not conducive to the physical practice of Qigong even among fully able-bodied people. An example is standing on a crowded train platform, or any other setting in which movement is restricted. Despite these constraints, anyone can engage in the mental dimensions of Qigong at any time. Stilling the mind while increasing productive attention is useful to everyone.

While this makes logical sense, the fact remains that physical and mental-only Qigong are two different practices. Diana Henz and Wolfgang I. Schöllhorn, of the Institute of Sports Science at the University of Mainz wondered if the effects of these two types of Qigong manifest

themselves the same way in the brain, or differently. Their findings appeared recently in the open access journal *Frontiers in Psychology*.

Henz and Schöllhorn recruited a group of 25 subject participants—13 female, 12 male. All of these individuals had significant experience in practicing Qigong. Every participant completed a physical version of Qigong followed by a mental-only version. After each instance of Qigong, Henz and Schöllhorn measured the effect of these efforts on each person's theta and alpha brain waves. Theta waves indicate the brain's state of internally directed attention, while alpha waves are a neurophysiological correlate for relaxation. Electroencephalogram (EEG) measurements are the standard tool to determine changes in these waves.

After conducting an extensive series of EEG measurements and statistical tests, Henz and Schöllhorn concluded, "Mental practice of the dynamic Qigong technique Wu Qin Xi has the same effect on EEG brain activity as physical training." In both cases—physical or mental-only practice—theta and alpha waves both increased in beneficial ways. This was particularly true when people practiced Qigong with their eyes open as opposed to closed.

This is good news for people who cannot perform the physical techniques of Qigong but are still interested in the practice. As Henz and Schöllhorn explain, "Mental practice of Wu Qin Xi is a suitable alternative therapeutic intervention to physical dynamic Qigong training."

**More information:** Diana Henz et al. EEG Brain Activity in Dynamic Health Qigong Training: Same Effects for Mental Practice and Physical Training?, *Frontiers in Psychology* (2017). [DOI: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00154](https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2017.00154)

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