

Tree exercise for relaxing body and mind

BY WARREN WILSON

In my experience in doing Qi Gong over the past 40 years I can verify this is one of the most beneficial Qi Gong practices you can do. Enjoy.

This exercise is beneficial for people who have:

- Difficulty in feeling grounded — anxious
- Insomnia — mind can't switch off at night
- Elevated blood pressure
- Poor breathing patterns
- Elevated levels of stress
- Poor circulation
- Low energy levels
- Menopausal symptoms

This exercise will have these effects:

- Create a sense of full body awareness
- Calm your mind
- Regulate your heart rhythm
- Slow your breathing rate
- Reinvigorate your energy levels
- Create heightened sensory awareness
- Release tension from the upper part of the body
- Regulate your body temperature

The **physical benefits** of doing this exercise are:

- Develop elasticity throughout your entire body
- Strengthen connective tissues and joint function
- Assist in better vertebral alignment
- Overall reduction in musculo-skeletal tension
- Reduction in pain (especially when related to blood stagnation)
- Improved joint mobility
- Improved micro-blood circulation
- Boost your immune system

The **mental/emotional benefits** of doing this exercise are:

- Improved levels of concentration
- The ability to 'empty the mind' and find stillness
- Feel the integration of your body and your mind
- Accumulated levels of stress are naturally released
- States of emotional imbalance can be brought back to harmony
- Enhanced levels of will power



Instructions

First thing to do is to stand comfortably with your feet about shoulder width apart (your feet are as wide as your shoulders).

Second, have your feet parallel (toes should be facing the front — not the sides).

Third, stand with your knees slightly bent. (Knees should be relaxed and not stiff.)

Fourth, have your head lifting up (just like a piece of string is holding up your head — from the top of the head). This means that your whole body is going to be relaxed and you will not have any tension in your body.

Make sure your head is not lifting back, so let your chin rest naturally.

Fifth, have your arms spread out to the sides with your elbows relaxed and your hands and fingers relaxed.

So that is the basic posture. This exercise is called the tree exercise.

Your feet are like roots in the ground

Your legs are the bottom of the tree trunk

Your body is the upper part of the tree trunk

*Your arms are like the branches,
supple and expressive*

Your head is like the top of the tree canopy

The exercise is commenced, by starting in the posture described above.

Next, be aware of your breathing:

When you breathe in, your body expands slightly and you feel your body rising a little.

When you breathe out, your body contracts slightly and you feel your body sinking a little.

So with every in-breath and out-breath you are just feeling the gentle movement of your body — rising and descending.

Now to help your body to relax more when you breathe out have the feeling that your arms are 'growing' and becoming longer.

So with every out-breath you are letting the tension in your shoulders, neck and head go out through your arms, then fingers.

You will feel a sinking down feeling, just like a tree. But at the same time you will feel strong as your legs become like a tree.

When you feel comfortable doing this you can gently close your eyes and just watch your breathing — but the main focus is on the out-breath, and the feeling that your arms are 'growing'. This will move the 'old energy' from your body and let the 'new energy' come into your body.

Simultaneously, from the soles of your feet, 'feel' roots growing deep into the earth. This will assist in becoming grounded in your practice and eventually you will be able to bring energy into your body through the soles of your feet. The deeper you feel the roots go into the earth, the greater the potential for bringing energy into your body.

There are two acupuncture points on the soles of the feet. These points are called 'bubbling spring' and form the basis for the beginning of the Kidney energy channel system of the body. (See below for an exercise to open up these points by using a golf ball.)

Explanation of the breath

When we breathe in we are receiving energy from the universe. When we breathe out we are giving energy back to the universe. So that is the cycle of life and death.

'With every in-breath we are born again and with every out-breath we die.'

So by focusing on the out-breath we can then make more space for 'new energy' to come into our body, but we have to make space first.

So that is why we focus on the out-breath.

It is like the farmer who is planting his seeds in the earth. First he must remove the weeds from the earth so the new seeds can grow freely. This is the creation of space that the out-breath gives.

Start by doing this exercise for about 5 minutes. Your legs may get a little sore/stiff so don't over do it.

If you feel tension accumulating in your body then with the in-breath you can raise your shoulders and on the out-breath lower them again. This will relax your body and enable your qi to descend freely.

While you are doing this exercise keep your focus on the bottom of your feet and the 'growing' of your arms, down towards the floor.

To enhance the feeling of connection to the earth through the soles of the feet as a separate exercise you can use a golf ball to open up the 'bubbling spring' points on the bottom of the feet. This point is the beginning of the Kidney channel and connects us with the earth, i.e. it grounds us.

You place your foot over the golf ball and apply your body weight on the ball. Do this on the out-breath. Take pressure off on the in-breath. Repeat 10 times each side. Then you can commence the tree exercise with more awareness about being connected to the earth.

Locating the point Yong Quan (Kidney 1): Divide the sole of the foot into thirds. The point is located at the junction of the upper and middle third of the sole of the foot, in the depression.

Alignment

The alignment of the body from the top of the head through the spine to the coccyx is one of being suspended from the top and just hanging down.

A variation of the standing position is in sitting form. Same principles apply.

ie. Aligning your being between 'heaven and earth'.

The 'energetic alignment' is connecting the 2 kidney points, which form the base of the triangle, and connection to the Du 20 point on top of the head, which forms the apex of the triangle. This is tapping into 'sacred geometry' and will enhance your practice exponentially.

The Tree Exercise is an experiential practice. To feel what is happening, not just imagining the process. If you imagine you can be caught up in a mental process. To feel the exercise enables you to integrate body, mind and spirit — the three treasures.

Warren Wilson is an acupuncturist and Chinese herbalist who has been practising for 25 years. He is also an experienced qigong and shiatsu instructor. Warren trained in Japan (Zen shiatsu with Suzuki Takeo), Korea (qigong/Oriental medicine), Australia (Chinese medicine), as well as completing a hospital internship in China. Warren is an occasional lecturer with the University of Western Sydney's masters degree program in TCM.

