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## **9 Exercises to Develop Immunity**

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## Exercises to Develop Immunity



This manual is intended as an accompaniment to the video series of these exercises found on our YouTube channel, Purple Cloud TV.

These exercises have been compiled from several different traditional Chinese therapeutic exercise and martial arts systems including Tai Ji Quan, Yi Quan, Tong Bei Quan, various other systems of Wudang Daoist Qi Gong and Meditation as well as a close reading of many ancient Chinese texts in order to help develop a healthy immune system. Gratitude is owed to all of my teachers in the development of these exercises, most notably Sun Xiangyong, Abbot of White Horse Mountain Li Shifu and Andrew Nugent-Head each of whom greatly added to the knowledge of Chinese medicine and traditional Chinese movement therapies that have been compiled here. The exercises are designed to adhere to the theory and philosophy of Chinese medicine with particular attention is paid to breath and Lung function.

The exercises have been simplified as much as possible to ensure safety and ease of understanding, while still maintaining their efficacy. Language has been kept as simple as possible for the same reason.

The exercises are divided into three sets with three sections each. The first set is focused on improving Lung function. The second set continues to address Lung function, also focusing on balancing the system and improving Kidney function and the third on meditative practice. They have been kept as simple as possible to ensure safety and ease of understanding.

The three sets have been designed so that each set or each individual exercise may be each trained independently at separate times, or the complete series may be performed during the course of one training session. The timing of each exercise can be adjusted accordingly.

If at any time during the practice there is any pain, dizziness, lightheadedness or any other significant discomfort, it is recommended to reduce the size and intensity of the movements. It is important not to overstrain any of the joints in the practice. If this does not stop the pain, it is recommended to cease doing the movement and move onto the next one. Likewise, if one is feeling fatigue from a particular movement, it is recommended to move onto the next movement.

One should not rush through the practice, or be attached to results as this will impede progress. It is important not to push our bodies too far in this kind of practice.

Before a detailed break down of each individual exercise, basic posture, breathing and other requirements first need to be addressed.

In the standing postures, some discomfort may arise after time. Hold the posture only as long as you can maintain gentle, steady breathing and a relaxed facial expression.

You may also feel a soreness when massaging the tender areas of the body. In most cases, strong massage of such areas is therapeutic as it helps to break up stagnation and improve blood flow. However, you should not massage with such force that you bruise or feel sharp pain. At the end of the day, decide what is an appropriate pressure for you.

## Posture and Alignment



Figure 1

This sequence should be repeated at least three times before beginning every practice.

First stand in natural posture hip width apart in a comfortable stance (*Fig. 1*), seated on a chair or cross-legged on the ground.

Let the tongue gently rest on the roof of the mouth.

### 1. Lifting the Head and Raising the Neck 头领项抗

With eyes facing forwards, soften the gaze. Draw up the scalp to the sky, noticing yourself feeling taller as the cervical vertebrae in the neck stretch out and decompress. The slide the chin in slightly while the neck moves backwards and continues to extend up to the sky. This sensation of lifting should remain in place for the entire length of the practice.

### 2. Dropping the Shoulders and Sinking the Elbows 沉肩坠肘

Start by relaxing Jian Jing area (*Fig. 2*), allowing the breath to gently reach the muscle as it sinks down into the ground. Relax the collar bones and the pectoral muscles around Zhong Fu acupuncture point (*Fig. 2*), allowing them to sink downward. Next, relax and sink the shoulder blades down the back, then allows the shoulder joint itself to relax and open, slowly noticing the sensation flow down the arms to the elbow joints. Finally, allow the elbow joints to relax and open, continuing the sensation down the forearms wrists and hands.

### 3. Drawing in the Abdomen and Sinking the Buttocks 收腹溜臀

Gently pull in the navel and lower abdomen while keeping the muscles relaxed while simultaneously relaxing and dropping the muscles of the buttock to the ground.

The Chinese character literally means to “slide” the buttocks. This movement should allow more weight to sink down through the legs and the whole upper back area to relax downwards while the neck remains gently stretching upwards to the sky.

### 4. Rounding the Groin and Balancing the Hips 圆裆合胯

Allow the adductor muscles of the inner thighs to round as if holding a ball between the legs. Ensure the hip flexor muscles on the front of the hips are level and slightly concave.



Figure 2



**Figure 3**

### 5. Relaxing the Chest and Descending the Qi 舒胸下气

Relax Shan Zhong point (Fig. 3) in the centre line of the chest roughly in line with the nipples, and the muscles surrounding it. Ideally it should be as soft as that of a small child. This means the chest is rounded on both the horizontal and vertical axes. At all costs, the chest should not protrude out as it causes pressure on the heart and chest cavity. This will cause Qi to bind in the chest and it will be unable to drop down.

Then from the chest allow the mind to move slowly down the body and down the legs accompanied by a gentle, relaxed sinking sensation. Allow the sensation to continue through the ribcage and abdomen, through the waist hips continuing down the knees through the ankles into the feet. This is called *Lowering the Qi*.

### 6. Sinking Both Feet into the Ground 双脚踏地

Allow the ankle joint to relax and open. Let the muscles of the soles of the feet and the toes relax, spread out and sink down into the floor.

If you are having issues getting any sensation in your feet at all, massaging the bottoms of the feet may help improve sensation over time. A massage ball, golf ball, tennis ball or rolling pin can be great tools to help massage the soles of the feet and help break up stagnant tissue to improve flow.

## Breathing



Breathing should be slow, gentle, relaxed and quiet during these practices. If you can hear your own breath, it is likely you are breathing too loudly.

Standing or seated, let the tongue rest on the roof of the mouth and breathe in and out gently through the nose for the length of the practice.

As much as possible there should be no strain in the body or breath. Do not force the breath, it should remain comfortable throughout the entirety of the practice. In and out, the breath should be controlled and smooth.

With each breath in, the diaphragm should move downwards, allowing the lungs to open and expand. With each breath out, the diaphragm will naturally rise upwards and the space in the lungs and chest cavity will contract (Fig 4).



A person's regular respiratory rate is 16-20 times per minute, which can be reduced to 1-2 times a minute or even longer with regular practice.

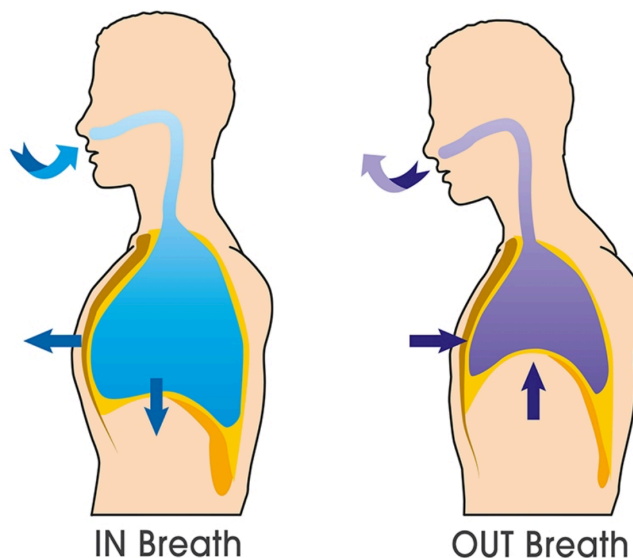


Figure 4

## Dan Tian Breathing



Figure 5

Some parts of the practice will focus specifically on Dan Tian abdominal breathing. However, it should be maintained as much as possible throughout the entire practice unless other breathing methods are specifically mentioned. Over time and practice, this kind of breathing will become second nature and will not require specific thought or focus. This breathing can also be practised as a stand alone meditation practice, either seated, standing or lying on the ground.

Allow the breath to originate from the Lower Dan Tian area in the lower abdomen (*Fig. 5*), gradually expanding and filling the whole body on the inhale. On each exhale, allow the body to contract with the breath from the peripheries of the body back into the Lower Dan Tian area in the abdomen. During inhalation, relax the muscles of the abdomen so it can expand gently and naturally. During exhalation, very subtly contract the muscles of the abdomen and allow the abdomen to gently pull inwards.

This rise and fall of the abdomen will increase in range with continued practice, and over time the abdomen will replace the chest as the starting and ending point of each breath.

It is also important while doing this that one does not lose touch with the movement of the chest, diaphragm and the lungs. These areas and the Dan Tian should all be moving in harmony together with each inhale and exhale.

If at any time there is any kind of pain or discomfort while practising this breathing, cease practising it immediately and return to breathing naturally and comfortably.

## General Rules of Practice



- Wear comfortable, loose fitting clothes and shoes for the practice.
- Keep the eyes half-closed and maintain a soft gaze.
- Keep the tongue touching the roof of the mouth.
- Breathe gently using long, slow, deep, quiet breaths. If you can hear yourself breathing you are probably breathing too loudly.
- All breathing should be done in and out of the nose.
- One should not train with a full stomach. It is best to wait 2 hours after eating before training.
- Do not train in a thunder storm, or outdoors in a foggy or smoky environment. It is best to find a tidy place with a good circulation of fresh air, indoors or outdoors, to train in.
- Pregnant or menstruating woman are advised to abstain from unsupervised practice.

## Exercises to Develop Immunity



### **Set 1 Exercise 1** (Fig. 6)

#### **Stretching and Massaging the Meridians** 拉筋按經

- A. With one arm out 90 degrees to the side of the body, place one palm on a wall, wrist forward, thumb facing up.
- B. Stretch from the thumb to the pectoral muscle, feeling the stretch running through the wrist, elbow and shoulder.
- C. Find the Zhong Fu area 中府 (Fig. 2), located on the outside edge of the pectoral muscle in the space under the first rib, in the tender area around 5-8cm under the spot where the collar bone attaches to the shoulder joint.
- D. Take 9 long, slow deep breaths, feeling the Zhong Fu area expand on the inhale and contract on the exhale.
- E. Begin to massage the muscles around the Zhong Fu area, focusing on any tender spots if it feels appropriate for you.
- F. Massage the trapezius muscle around Jian Jing point (Fig. 2), squeezing any tender areas if it feels appropriate for you.
- G. Massage down the path of the Lung Channel marked by the black line in (Fig. 6), down the bicep, elbow and forearm. Stretch the thumb.
- H. Repeat the process on the other side.



**Figure 6**

### **Set 1 Exercise 2** (Fig. 7)

#### **Opening and Closing the Lungs** 開合肺臟

- A. Stand in a neutral posture (Fig. 1)
- B. Bring both palms to rest under the navel on the lower Dantian (Fig. 5). Take 9 deep breaths to settle the mind, expanding the abdomen on the inhale and contracting it on the exhale. (see: Dan Tian Breathing p.5)

- C. Drop the Shoulders and bring the arms to the side of the body.
- D. Breathe in and raise the arms directly to the front, palms facing down.



Figure 7

- E. Continue to breathe in, bringing the arms into a trident shape and expanding the body with breath from toes to fingers.
- F. Begin to exhale, dropping the arms to a T shape with the palms facing forwards .
- G. Continue to exhale, while contracting the body and bringing the palms slowly together at shoulder height. Try to feel a growing sense of pressure between the palms as they get closer together.
- H. Continue to breathe out, drawing the breath down the body through the feet into the ground as the arms drop to the sides of the body.
- I. Repeat this exercise 9 - 36 times.

### **Set 1 Exercise 3 (Fig. 8)**

#### **Holding the Posture** 站椿

- A. Repeat sections D and E of Set 1 Exercise 2.
- B. Exhale, relaxing the elbows together from the trident position to make the posture more comfortable.
- C. Gently squeeze the muscles of the palms and fingers as if holding onto a balloon, not wanting to burst it but also not wanting to let it go.
- D. If you are a visually inclined person, you can try and imagine a glowing ball of white light in each palm as well.
- E. Hold this posture while doing Dan Tian breathing (see: Dan Tian Breathing) for 9-108 breaths.
- F. When complete, bring the palms to the lower Dan Tian and Dan Tian breathing (see: Dan Tian Breathing)?



Figure 8

**Set 2 Exercise 1** (Fig. 9)

**Stretching and Massaging the Meridians** 拉筋按經



**Figure 9**

- A. Stretch out the legs for 5-10 minutes
- B. Massage down the Yin channels of the legs marked by the black line in Fig 9. Start from the inner thigh, down the knee and the inner edge of the shin bone, down the ankle and the instep of the foot.
- C. Massage the bottom of the feet, pressing into any tender areas if appropriate.

**Set 2 Exercise 2** (Fig. 10)

**Balancing the Sun and Moon** 平衡日月

- A. Take a comfortable seat cross legged on the ground or in a chair.
- B. With the palms facing up, extend both arms out to the side.
- C. Imagine you are grasping a ball with the palms of both hands, activating the muscles of the fingers and the hand.
- D. Focus the attention on visualising the sun in the left hand and the moon in the right hand.
- E. Take 9-36 long, slow, gentle but deep breaths while maintaining the visualisation.
- F. Bring the hands down to rest on the knees when finished.



**Figure 10**



**Set 2 Exercise 3** (Fig. 11)**Activating the Kidneys** 開腎臟椿

Figure 11

- A. Place the backs of both hands over the lower back, ideally over both kidneys if you can comfortably reach.
- B. Grasp each hand as if you are holding onto a balloon, activating the muscles of the fingers and the hand just enough to hold onto the imagined balloon without bursting it.
- C. If you are a visual person, imagine the balloon having a blue colour.
- D. Gently squeeze and contract the balloon with the hands at a relaxed rhythm.
- E. Breathe gently and naturally.
- F. Hold the posture for 5 - 20 minutes.

**Set 3 Exercise 1** (Fig. 12)**Settling the Breath** 安靜呼吸

- A. In a seated position, interlace the fingers and bring the hands under the chin, palms facing down.
- B. Inhale fully and then exhale making a “Siiiiiiiiiii” sound.
- C. While making the sound, keep the upper and lower teeth opposite each other with a small gap in between. Press the tip of the tongue against the lower set of teeth allowing air out through the gap.
- D. While making the sound simultaneously push down with the chin on the hands.
- E. Repeat the movement 3-9 times.



Figure 12



Figure 13

### **Set 3 Exercise 2** (Fig. 13)

#### **Expanding and Contracting the Breath** 開盒呼吸

- A. Bring both hands in front of the abdomen with the palms facing each other.
- B. Imagine holding a balloon between both hands, activating the muscles of the fingers and the hand just enough to hold onto the imagined balloon without bursting it.
- C. If you are a visual person, imagine the balloon having a golden colour.
- D. On each inhale, gradually and gently pull and stretch on the balloon without bursting it or letting it go.
- E. On each exhale, gradually and gently push and compress on the balloon without bursting it or letting it go.
- F. Repeat the movement for 5-20 minutes.

### **Set 3 Exercise 3** (Fig. 14)

#### **Seated Meditation** 打坐

- A. Half close the eyes and bring both hands down to rest on the knees, palms facing down.
- B. Imagine a golden light in the lower Dan Tian (Fig. 5).
- C. Breathe gently and naturally (see: *Dan Tian Breathing* p.5)
- D. Maintain the exercise for 20-30 minutes.
- E. When completed, swallow any saliva in the mouth, gently open the eyes and stretch out the limbs.



Figure 14

## FAQs

### *How hard should I massage myself?*

One can massage oneself enough to feel a dull ache or a mild discomfort that subsides shortly after massage. One should not feel any sharp pain.

### *How often should I practice?*

3-5 times a week to start at a bare minimum. A daily practice is best, even if you can only manage 5 minutes, it is better than nothing. This being said, it is important not to over-exert yourself and overtrain.

### *Should I sit cross legged or in a chair?*

Sit in whatever position you can maintain comfortably for the entirety of the practice, keeping the spine as erect and upright as possible without tension.

### *How long should I do each exercise?*

The exercises are designed to be practiced flexibly according to individual ability and endurance, as well as factoring in time concerns. One should train according to one's own abilities on the day, ensuring one does not fatigue or over-train. One can focus on training a single set, or single exercise, or all three sets in one training session. The time spent on each exercise can be adjusted accordingly.

### *What if the visualisations don't work for me?*

Don't worry, some people are naturally more visual than others. Do not force any visualisations, they should come naturally. If one is unable to visualise a particular exercise or any of the exercises, just put this part of the practice to the side until the visualisations come naturally. Continue to do the physical part of the practice as normal.

