

## **Qigong and Tai Chi: A Health Journey Into Your Advancing Years**

Most people have heard of Tai Chi, but fewer are familiar with Qigong.

Qigong is a traditional Chinese practice of gentle, flowing exercises that promote health, healing, and vitality. Tai Chi, which originated as a martial art, is actually a form of Qigong and is now widely practised for its health benefits too.

Both disciplines emphasise relaxation and the repetition of smooth, mindful movements. For centuries in China, groups have gathered in parks and open spaces to practise together, day after day, benefiting from a shared routine and the restorative power of movement.

Qigong is energising and revitalising. It helps improve the body's energy flow and brings numerous physical and mental benefits. These include increased spinal mobility, better flexibility, relief from arthritis, improved balance, and better posture.

Poet Dylan Thomas famously wrote:

*Do not go gentle into that good night,  
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;  
Rage, rage against the dying of the light.*

Personally, I take a gentler view:

*Do, do go gentle into that good night,  
Qigong will relax and energise at close of day;  
Health and Qi in the dying of the light.*

As we age, we tend to give up the sports or exercises we once loved.

What did you do when you were younger?

I gave up squash at 26—partly due to a torn cartilage, but also from recognising the strain it placed on my ankles, knees, and hips.

Why did you stop?

Was it losing when you were used to winning? Feeling outpaced by others?

Did you notice a decline in speed, strength, flexibility, balance, eyesight or reaction time? Was it injury, loss of interest, or life simply getting in the way?

Perhaps it was something more specific—an old tennis shoulder, a football knee, or jogging sprains. Maybe the gym felt repetitive or uninspiring. Or the swimming pool too busy. Or cycling too risky.

For many, recovery becomes slower. Breathlessness creeps in. Arthritis flares.

Energy wanes. Memory falters. Physical confidence dips.

Then there's that awkward moment in a class with floor exercises—you struggle to get down, find the postures difficult, and can't leap up like a 20-year-old. You rely on a chair and feel self-conscious.

Perhaps walking is harder now. Hills and stiles are no longer manageable. A gentle potter has replaced the five-mile hike.

The reasons we stop are many—and deeply personal.

There's a Qigong saying about ageing:

“After 60, we weaken by the year. After 70, by the month. After 80, by the week. After 90, by the day.”

There's no fixed age when we suddenly feel "old." Each of us ages in our own way. Some in their 70s insist they're still in middle age, and I've met octogenarians who are stronger, more flexible, and more mentally sharp than people decades younger.

Ageing is a slow drift into stiffness. You lose range of movement, your balance fades, reaction time slows, and memory, hearing, and healing all decline.

Eventually, everything becomes more of an effort. You may begin hiding how you really feel, pretending to be fitter or more mobile than you are.

This is exactly where Qigong can help.

Many people in their 60s, 70s, 80s and even 90s are looking for an exercise practice that meets them where they are—something sustainable, gentle, and effective. And more and more medical and holistic practitioners are recommending Qigong to people over 60.

Unlike sports that focus on results—winning, levels, achieving goals—Qigong focuses on the process. You work gently toward better posture and movement, always respecting your body's current limits. You're never forced into deep stances or stretches. You *wait* for improvement to come, rather than push for it.

Confucius spoke of *wu wei*—the idea of "effortless action." This concept is at the heart of Qigong. When we slow down, relax, and move with mindfulness, the body and mind begin to work together. Over time, you'll notice your posture, strength, and balance improve. You'll feel fitter, calmer, and more energised.

Of course, ageing continues—we all wear out eventually. But Qigong slows that decline. It helps you stay healthier, more alert, and better able to cope with life's physical and mental changes.

One of the most moving Qigong sessions I've seen was in a care home, where most participants were living with dementia. Some used wheelchairs or had limited movement. But with help from carers, they joined in. They smiled, they moved, and they felt joy—even if they wouldn't remember it later. The benefit was real.

If staying healthy is a kind of battle, then the enemies aren't visible. It's not someone coming at you with fists raised. It's the sudden trip on a rug, the icy patch on the pavement, the oncoming cyclist you didn't notice. It's illness, inflammation, wear and tear.

But with a strong mind and body—better balance, faster reactions, greater awareness—you're more likely to avoid injury and recover from setbacks.

So why not try a class near you?

### **Qigong or Tai Chi—which to choose?**

Some enjoy slowly learning a Tai Chi form over many months. Others prefer the variety and wider range of movements in Qigong.

If you're unsure, start with Qigong. You can always switch later.

### **Before your first class, a few tips:**

- If you have medical concerns, talk to your doctor and your instructor.
- You're not alone. Instructors are used to teaching people of all ages and abilities.

- Wear loose, comfortable clothes and flat shoes.
- Dress in layers—Qigong is a gentle practice and you can cool down quickly.
- Always use your judgement. If a movement aggravates an old injury, skip it.
- Use a chair if needed—balance support is perfectly acceptable.
- Sit out and rest whenever you like.
- You'll soon make friends in class. Many people go for a coffee afterwards!
- Talk openly with your instructor about your health and limitations. They may suggest exercises tailored to you.
- Try to build a short daily routine at home. It's not easy to maintain, but those who do see great results.

Qigong benefits every part of your body—from muscles and joints to blood flow, organs, posture and energy levels.

You'll sleep better, feel more balanced and grounded, and breathe more deeply.

Your flexibility, coordination, and focus will improve.

And you'll become more relaxed, thanks to Qigong's meditative, mindful nature. It enhances visualisation, memory, and mental clarity—and connects you with nature and your own inner rhythm.

Take up Qigong—and increase your chances of a long, active, and healthy life.

**Live in an ageless springtime. Go for it!**

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