

Taoist Exercises for Feeling Young - Kenneth Cohen

Rejuvenate your body and mind with Taoist yoga.

We, Westerners treat old age like an illness and put our elderly away in nursing home-hospitals. Carl Jung once said, "Life is a disease with a very poor prognosis. It lingers on for years and invariably ends in death." But this approach is incorrect—no scientist will ever "cure" aging. According to Taoism, to grow old means to move closer to the vital source of life. If we can learn to draw on this source, then it is possible to fan lao huan t'ung—reverse aging and return to youthful vigor." With the proper spiritual training and exercise, it is possible to grow old gracefully, with dignity and in perfect health. Here are a few exercises, which can help us to practice what Taoists call the "Way of Longevity."

Arm Swinging

This is probably the most popular exercise for the elderly in China today. Even in the parks in San Francisco or New York's Chinatown, one can usually observe some old people vigorously swinging their arms back and forth. Unfortunately, few of them know the internal aspect of arm swinging which makes the technique effective.

*Stand with the feet shoulder-width apart, the knees slightly bent. The feet should be exactly parallel as any turning out of the feet will also rotate the femur (thigh bone), making standing more difficult. The back is straight, the entire body as relaxed and comfortable as possible. The toes should grip the ground; and imagine that the heels are pressing the ground. This will cause the arch of the foot to lift slightly and thus create a kind of suction, which draws the **chi**, vital energy, up from the ground into the body. While standing, let the arms swing freely forwards and backwards in an easy and natural motion. Do not change the posture or let the body sway as you do this. Swinging the arms will pump chi through the entire body. Practice about fifty repetitions, gradually increasing each day until you can swing the arms for five minutes.*

Let the motion become smaller and smaller until the arms rest naturally at your sides. Release the toes so the feet can relax. Stand a moment or two and experience the warmth or tingling sensation, which you will feel in various parts of the body.

(a) Lie on your right side. As you relax, slowly pull the left knee up and press it to the chest using both hands. Turn on your left side and repeat with the right knee.

(b) Practice this body movement for three minutes, six hours apart, to gradually control heart and liver problems.

(c) Sit on a straight chair. Then tuck the right ankle under the left thigh. Let your leg dangle freely over the floor. Clench your fist and, without tension, stretch your arms forward and back. Change positions of the legs and repeat.

(d) Practice this movement for three minutes, six hours apart, to help strengthen reproduction glands.

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