



Qigong

Industry experts share how spas and resorts can advance their wellness programming with qigong.

What is qigong?

Bryon Abrams, qigong instructor at Mohonk Mountain House, New Paltz, New York: Qigong is a meditative practice that combines slow postures, stretches and movements with deliberate breathwork to achieve physical, mental and spiritual balance.

Joseph Nase, qigong instructor at Spa Solage, Auberg Resorts, Calistoga, California: Qigong is one of the four pillars of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM): Acupuncture, Massage, Herbal Medicines and Qigong. The word qigong breaks down as qi, which translates as vitality, energy, life-force; and gong, which translates as practice, cultivate, refine. So, qigong is the cultivating and refining through practicing one's vitality or life force.

The Chinese believe that through a set of body postures, movement, breathwork and meditation, you

can trigger the beginning and enhancing of the natural healing systems of the body.

Terrie Absher, licensed medical esthetician and founder of Total Glow MD, Menlo Park, California: Qigong has been practiced for thousands of years specifically for health benefits. I would describe it as a breathing exercise done in specific stances and movement with a very focused intent. It has been used to improve the mind, body and spirit for both physical and mental health. It moves the qi (breath) in our system where it may be stuck so energy can flow naturally throughout our body.

How can spas incorporate qigong into their wellness programming?

Absher: What I like the best about qigong and similar practices is how much they improve the quality of

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well-being for the individual as well as the business overall. Qigong is very simple to incorporate into a spa menu. Like meditation, it doesn't require a lot of space. Employees can stand at their station away from others, which is important right now, or gather in an open area for social distancing purposes.

While it takes months to master qigong, you can easily and successfully add just one stance or movement at a time. In other words, it can be incorporated right away with beginners—even just 5 to 10 minutes can provide mental and physical benefits by uplifting someone's mood and simply helping them feel good.

Nase: Qigong and tai chi are being practiced by many in the U.S. With its growing popularity, now is a great time to add qigong to fitness programs at spas, and the practice will greatly enhance therapists' well-being and their understanding of how energy affects the body. Therapists can then use these insights to treat the body as whole, instead of working back, arms and legs separately.

Abrams: Spas can incorporate qigong into their programming easily by bringing in an expert who is well versed in both the art and science of the practice, as well as working with guests across all age groups to ensure each individual has a fulfilling experience. One of the greatest features about qigong is that it can be practiced anytime, anywhere; Mohonk's classes, for example, are held in a yoga studio without any special equipment. Many of our guests fall in love with our qigong sessions and decide to pursue it further on their own!

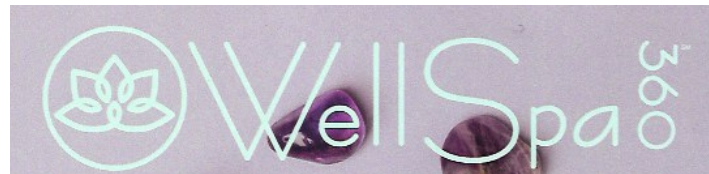
What are the benefits of practicing qigong?

Abrams: Qigong offers an immediate sense of calm and stress release, along with long term benefits such as better sleep quality, improved cognitive awareness and even lowered blood pressure. Many participants tell us that Mohonk's classes have helped relieve their neck and back tension, and many long-time guests say that qigong has helped prevent future strain on their joints and strengthen their bodies.

Absher: Qigong has many benefits based upon opening up the flow of our qi, which is our energy, to revitalize us mentally, physically and spiritually. Hectic schedules or life stresses can take a toll on our well-being. By opening up the energy flow in our meridian, which is emphasized in acupuncture and certain Ayurveda treatments, our bodies experience healing benefits while our mental clarity increases and our spiritual awareness is uplifted. Guests can also experience better sleep, toned muscles and improvements in anxiety and other stressors. The benefits vary and, like anything else, there isn't just one thing but a collection of healthful practices that combined together increase our quality of life.

Nase: Qigong can balance, strengthen and have a healing effect on the systems of the body. Qigong increases the flow and supply of energy throughout the body, and it can have a variety of rejuvenating effects including increasing energy, promoting calm mental and emotional states, and reducing feelings of anxiety and depression.





How do you choose a qigong training path?

Abrams: We recommend beginning under the instruction of an expert, but once you grasp the basics, you can further that practice in any space and explore different ways to enhance your practice, whether that may be incorporating music or singing bowls. At Mohonk, we also incorporate qigong with more modern exercises, such as our Chi robotics classes, where we merge qigong with cardio dance for a fun and more energetic way to build coordination and body strength.

Absher: There are a few different ways to train in qigong for your own self-care. There are so many incredible books and videos that make qigong accessible to everyone, allowing you to take charge of feeling better and improving your health and overall well-being. This allows you to direct your practice. The only rule I would apply to qigong is to try to take a few minutes to do it daily or as much as you can.

A practice can be as short as 5 minutes or as long as 30 minutes. Short daily increments are better than infrequent longer sessions, which applies to most other practices as well. Enrolling a few friends, family members or work colleagues definitely helps turn it into a habit, although self-practice is very popular. It is what works best for you.

With guests, recommend that they work with a professional. Many find incorporating a new practice into their lives boosts the staying power if they work with a professional and have a personal connection learning the practice. This also opens the door to go beyond a personal health practice and move to more advanced levels. 🌿