

Five Animals Qi Gong (五禽戲 Wu Qin Xi)

The "Five Animals" (五禽戲, Wu Qin Xi) are a set of qigong exercises developed during the Han dynasty (202 BC - 220 AD). There are claims that this Qi Gong set is authored by "Huatuo", one of the most famous and highly respected Chinese physician and surgeon in Chinese history.

The five animals in the exercises are the tiger, deer, bear, monkey and bird. According to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) theory of the Five Elements, each animal has two exercises corresponding to the yin and yang internal organs (Zang/Fu). Regular practise of this Qi Gong is said to improve functioning of the Liver/Gall Bladder (Wood Element - tiger), Kidneys/Bladder (Water Element - deer), Spleen/Stomach (Earth Element - bear), Heart/Small Intestine (Fire Element - monkey) and Lung/Large Intestine (Metal Element - bird) respectively.

Tiger

Tiger raising paw

- Concentrate strength in the fingers as they are spread.
- When raising palms, expand chest and contract abdomen.
- When lowering palms, contract chest and relax abdomen.
- Eyes following movement of the hands.
- Inhale as palms are raised, exhale as palms are lowered.
- Promotes circulation of Qi in the triple warmer.
- Reinforces grip power and drives blood circulation to the extreme joints of the arms.

Tiger seizing prey

- Extend arms forward as far as possible keeping spine straight and fully extended.
- Movements are continuous and coordinated from legs to body to arms.
- When seizing the prey on empty stance, adjust depth and speed according to an individual's physical condition.
- Strength applied is reinforced by Qi from the Dantian all the way to the finger tips.
- Improves flexibility and suppleness of the spine.
- Strengthens lumbar muscles, prevent and treat common problems of the waist.



Deer

Deer colliding

- When the waist is rotated and bent laterally, the concave side should be tight while the convex side should be fully stretched.
- Rear heel must be firmly planted on the ground to increase the rotating range of the hip and waist.
- Inhale when raising hands, exhale when rotating body.
- Increases muscular strength in the waist and nourishes the kidneys.
- Can prevent and treat disturbances in the vertebrae.

Deer running

- When shifting weight backwards, the arms are extended forward, from the head down the back, abdomen and legs should form a vertical bow.
- Inhale when stepping forward, exhale when forming the bow.
- Prevents and treats frozen shoulder and corrects deformity of the spinal column.
- Promotes circulation of Qi through the Dumai¹ meridian.



Bear

Bear rotating waist

- Motion of the waist and abdomen is driven from an internal force.
- Inhale when lifting upward and exhale when leaning forward and downward.
- Can prevent and treat lumber muscular strains or soft tissue injury of the back.
- Improves functions of the stomach and spleen.
- Has a massaging effect on the digestive system to prevent or treat indigestion, poor appetite, abdominal distension and constipation.

Bear swaying

- The leg is lifted by contracting the lateral lumber muscles then flexing the knee.
- Drop the leg heavily on the ground to produce a slight tremor that transmits to the hip joint.
- Can adjust functions of the liver and spleen.
- Strengthens muscles around hips and lower limbs, improves balance.



¹ Dumai meridian starts from the anus, runs up along the back to the top of the head and down the centre of the face, stopping at the gum on the upper teeth.

Monkey

Monkey raising paws

- Lift the shoulders, contract the abdomen, pull the pelvic bottom up and then lift the heels.
- Relax the shoulders, abdomen, pelvic bottom and then drop the heels.
- Inhale when lifting the hands, exhale when pressing the hands down.

Monkey plucking fruit

- Eyes follow the arms and the fruit.
- Contract the body in empty stance and fully extend when reaching for the fruit.
- Improves blood circulation to the brain.
- Integrating the complicated movements with mental focus is useful for preventing and treating nervousness and mental depression.



Bird

Bird stretching

- Contract the neck, shoulders and hip region when raising the hands and relax when lowering the hands.
- Protrude the body forward to assume a bow shape when the arms are extended backward.
- Improves lung capacity and can alleviate symptoms of chronic bronchitis and pulmonary emphysema.
- Stimulates the Dumai and Renmai² meridians.

Bird flying

- Expand the chest when the arms are stretched outwards, contract the chest when the arms are moving downwards.
- Inhale when raising the hands, exhale when lowering the hands.
- Promotes respiration and expansion of the chest.
- Has a massaging effect on the heart and lungs, improving oxygenation of blood.
- Stimulates the Lung³ meridian.
- Improves balance.



² Renmai meridian starts from the perineum, runs up the front of the body and stops at the center of the mentolabial groove directly below the lip.

³ Lung meridian starts at the inner shoulder, extends along medial surface of the upper arms and stopping at the tip of the thumb.