

## QIGONG FACE MASSAGE

By Margaret Emerson

**T**his is a qigong exercise I've been doing every morning for the past twenty years. Many of my students have adopted it too. It wakes up the face and brain and generates currents of nourishing, healing qi throughout the body. Like T'ai Chi, it's stimulating and relaxing at the same time. My sister has used it before going to bed at night in order to help her sleep.

The basics were taught to me by Karen Kramer from Berkeley. I later added acupressure points on the face that I learned from Master Wen Mei Yu. John Yamas, O.M.D., L.Ac. and Rebecca Ellis, N.D., L.Ac. expanded and solidified my understanding of the exercise.

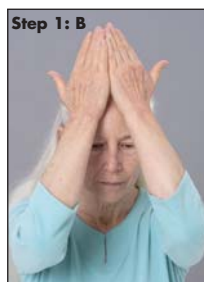
The face massage takes only about five minutes. It can be done either partially or totally. Anything you're directed to do twelve times can be done any multiple of twelve times. (According to my original teacher, Kao Ching-hua, the Chinese do many things in multiples of twelve because that's the number of animals in their zodiac.) I do most things twenty-four times.

Prior to beginning, rub your hands together vigorously while shaking your belly. The belly contains the dan tian, your qi bank and qi pump. Shaking it catalyzes the flow of qi. Rubbing the hands together draws blood and qi to the hands and opens the lao gongs—the energy centers in the middle of the palms through which you can emit and receive energy.

1. Hold the palms in front of you, little fingers touching. Starting with the fingertips at the chin, rub the palms gently upward over the center



of the face until the heels of the hands reach the hairline. Then move out to the sides of the face and back down to the chin. Do this lightly and quickly thirty times,



breathing out through the nose on the upstroke and in through the mouth on the downstroke. Breathe shallowly to avoid hyperventilating.

2. Place the left hand on the highest point of the head—the baihui. With three fingers of the right hand, rub the back of the head from just below



to just above the prominent bone—the occipital ridge—at the base of the skull. Do this lightly and quickly sixty

times. This stimulates the acupressure point known as “wind mansion” (also known as fengfu or Governor Vessel 16). Centered at the base of the skull where the neck tendons begin, wind mansion treats headache, migraines, and infections accompanied by fever. It also has a tranquilizing effect. Placing two hands on different parts of the body creates a current between them, and in this case increases qi flow through the brain.

3. Reverse your hands and repeat the above.

4. Using the middle three fingers of both hands, rub upward on either



side of the back of the neck, starting below and behind the ears and ending at the occipital ridge. After each upstroke, pull the hands away from the head and start at the bottom again—there's no downstroke. Do this fifty times, lightly and quickly. You're massaging the twin points known as “wind pool” (fengqi, Gall Bladder 20) located on either side of the neck at the base of the skull. Wind pool is useful for headaches, migraines, dizziness, insomnia, eye problems, tinnitus, colds, flu, fever, and high blood pressure.

5. To prepare for the eye wash, rub the *outside* of each thumb vigorously on the opposite palm. This warms the thumbs, filling them with blood and qi. Pull the backs of the thumbs gently over the closed eyelids, starting at the ridge of the nose and moving out to the hairline at the temples. Then do the same thing below the eye.



## Qi Department: Qigong

You're working within the eye socket. Do this twelve times—six across the eyelids and six just under the eye.

6. For the nose rub, form the hands into fists with thumbs outstretched. Hold the fists together so the backs of the thumbs are facing you. Start with the heels of the thumbs at the hairline above the forehead and rub lightly down the face, parting the thumbs to go to either side



Step 6: A



Step 6: B



Step 6: C

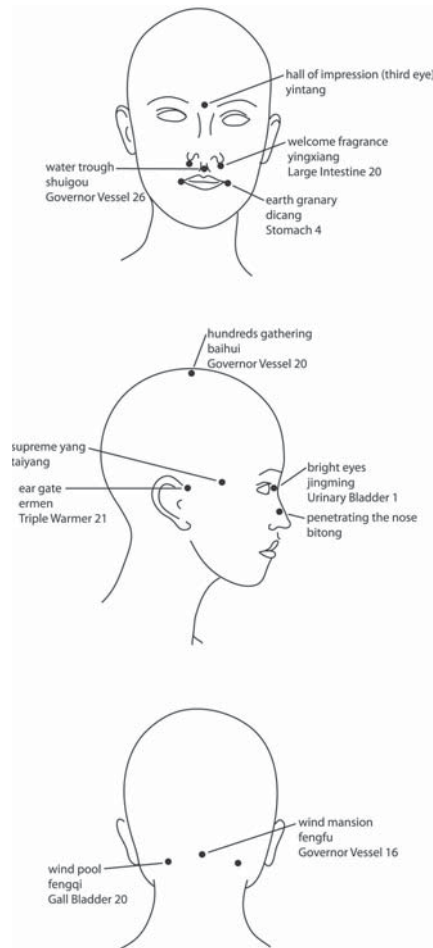
of the nose, then rejoining to finish with the tips of the thumbs under the chin. Do this twelve times.

7. Using the middle finger of each hand, massage the following points with an inward, circular motion twelve times:

- Start with the two symmetrical points at the corners of the mouth. Acupressure here at “earth granary” (dicang, Stomach 4) can relax facial muscles and is good for facial tremors and paralysis.
- Move up and find the depressions in the bone at the outer edges of the nostrils. This is “welcome fragrance” (yingxiang, Large Intestine 20). Rubbing this point relieves colds, allergies, and sinusitis. It also strengthens the large intestine and is very effective at stimulating bowel movements—a good acupressure point to know about if you're constipated.



Step 7



- Proceed upward to the place on either side of the nose where the bone ends and the cartilage begins. Known as “penetrating the nose” or bitong, this point strengthens eyesight and is good for sinusitis.
- Raise the fingers to either side of the bridge of the nose—to “bright eyes” (jingming, Urinary Bladder 1). This point relieves swelling, pain, and itchiness of the eye and eyelid and is good for night blindness, color blindness, and blurred vision.
- Next, circle with both fingers at the “third eye” between the eyebrows. The Chinese call this “hall of impression” or yintang. Massaging here calms the emotions. It can also alleviate headache, dizziness, and confusion as well as eye and nose ailments.
- Starting where the eyebrows meet, pull out to the temples twelve times.

- Using three fingers of each hand, massage the temples. This point (“supreme yang” or taiyang) is crossed by the Stomach, Bladder, and Triple Warmer meridians (qi pathways). Many people rub this point instinctively to soothe a headache.
- Place three fingers of each hand on either side of the crown of the head and circle twelve times. This is where all the yang meridians converge. Called “hundreds gathering” (baihui, Governor Vessel 20), this point treats headaches, dizziness, insomnia, blurred vision, high blood pressure, and strokes.
- Find the depression in the bone where the upper part of the ear joins the head. This is “ear gate” (ermen, Triple Warmer 21). Press in at this point, then pull down to just under the jaw. This hits a number of points, including “auditory palace” (tinggong, Small Intestine 19). Do this twelve times. These points sharpen hearing and ameliorate tinnitus, facial pain, and paralysis. They also have a calming effect.
- Finally, press the side of the index finger of one hand just under the nose. Hold it there for a count of twelve. This point—“water trough” (shuigou, Governor Vessel 26) can stop a runny or bloody nose. It's also considered an emergency point for trauma, convulsions, and cramps.

8. The next phase of the face massage is called “bang the heavenly drum.” With the fingers pointing toward the back of the head, place the palms over the ears to create a light suction. Cross the index fingers over the middle fingers and then snap the index

(continued on page 10)



Step 8: A



Step 8: B

## Qi Department: Qigong

fingers down, hitting the twin wind pool points (fengqi, Gall Bladder 20) just under the occipital ridge. Do this twelve times. This can clear hearing and relieve tinnitus and pain at the back of the head.

9. For the neck rub, begin with the hand behind and below the ear and rub downward and forward toward the center of the neck, twelve times. Repeat on the left side. This backwashes blood through the carotid artery to the heart, slowing the heart rate and calming you down. Be sure to rub one side of the neck at a time, not both at once. If too much blood is backwashed, you could faint. Finish by gently drawing one hand after the other down the center of the throat from chin to collar bone twelve times.

10. Holding the outer rim of the ear with the thumb and index finger of each hand, start at the top of the ear and follow the rim down to the ear

lobe twelve times. The ear is a microcosm of the body (the British call it “the little man in the ear”) and massaging it helps stimulate all systems. You’re only working with the outer edge of the ear here.

11. Complete the face massage by making the fingers of both hands into claws and dragging them over the scalp from the hairline at the forehead back to the nape of the neck. Then do the same thing starting at the temples and going back to the nape of the neck. Each stroke counts as one. Repeat twelve times. This hits all the yang channels of qi in the body and stimulates the scalp. I do this one thirty-six times—it’s hard to stop at twelve or twenty-four.

Perform each step of the face massage with focused intention. This exercise harmonizes the nervous system and summons energy, clarity, and tranquility. It’s also great for the complexion. ■

Margaret Emerson has been practicing T'ai Chi, qigong, and meditation since 1979 and teaching since 1989. She lives in Arcata, California where she also writes and paints. Her books are *Breathing Underwater: The Inner Life of T'ai Chi Ch'uan*, *A Potter's Notes on Tai Chi Chuan*, and *Eyes of the Mirror*, a memoir. She is a contributor to the book *Martial Arts Teachers on Teaching*, also to *Qi Journal*, *Black Belt Magazine*, and *Aikido Today*. Her new video is “Wu T'ai Chi, Kao Style: As Practiced and Taught by Margaret Emerson.” Margaret's Web site is [www.margaretemerson.com](http://www.margaretemerson.com). You can also reach her at (707) 822-6508.

*Photos of the author by Brandi Easter  
Illustrations by the author*