



Flow to

Looking to establish a relaxing prebedtime routine? Simple, soothing exercises inspired by Traditional Chinese Medicine can help balance your energy to ensure a good night's sleep

by Terri Trespicio
photographs by Henry Leutwyler

Given how tired everyone feels these days, it's clear just how precious a good night's sleep has become. If you count yourself among the tossers and turners, you're in the exhausted majority: In a recent poll conducted by the National Sleep Foundation, 75 percent of respondents experienced sleep problems for at least a few nights a week in the past year—up almost 15 percent from 1999. There's also been a simultaneous increase in pills and products promising a satisfying slumber.

According to the tenets of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM), however, a movement-based alternative makes for a healthier approach. Using qigong, a healing art drawn from TCM, you can correct even occasional sleep problems at their source, allowing you to feel healthy and rested again.

☯ From the TCM perspective, a disruption of the free flow of *qi*, or energy, through the body affects any number of health issues, including sleep. The problem worsens when the imbalance centers on the liver, spleen, heart, or kidneys—not just the organs themselves, as we think about them in Western terms, but also the attributes of each. As Claudette Baker, L.Ac., president emeritus of the American Association of

sleep

Oriental Medicine, explains, “In TCM, by using the term ‘liver,’ for instance, we’re referring to the energetic function of that organ in addition to the liver itself. In this case, weak liver energy can result in improper blood and qi flow, which interferes with sleep.” Both liver and kidney deficiency can also contribute to excess yang, an imbalance that increases body heat and restlessness, further hindering sleep. ☯ Qigong (pronounced chee-gung), a major branch of TCM, uses slow,

graceful movements to improve circulation and parasympathetic nervous-system function. This, in turn, helps balance yin (the dark, cool, receptive, feminine energy) and yang (the light, hot, active, masculine energy). “By bringing us into a state of homeostasis, qigong can free us from the tension that might otherwise keep us awake,” explains qigong expert Shoshanna Katzman, L.Ac., author of *Qigong for Staying Young*. ☯ While vigorous exercise before

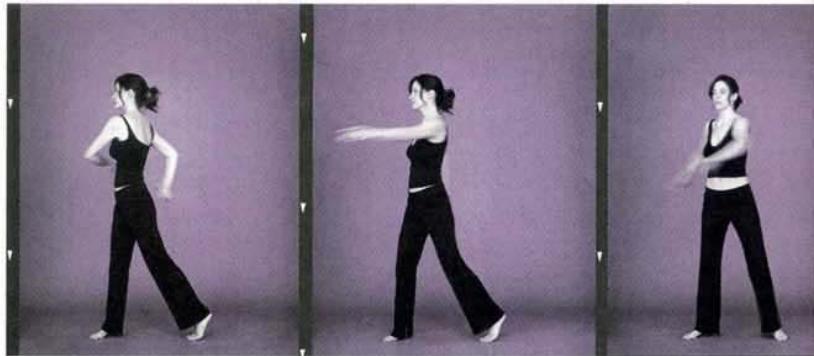
bed can interfere with sleep, qigong won't ramp up your heart rate.

Rather, it helps relax and unwind mind and body, preparing you for a restful night. Katzman designed the following qigong sequence for use before bed. Each exercise targets key areas of the body, such as the liver, kidneys, heart, and spleen, believed in TCM to trigger feelings of stress, fear, and worry. By reducing tension, balancing hormone levels, and gently stimulating blood flow, qigong will calm your spirit and prepare your body for a night of deep, restorative sleep. ☯

1 rag-doll twist

relieve tension

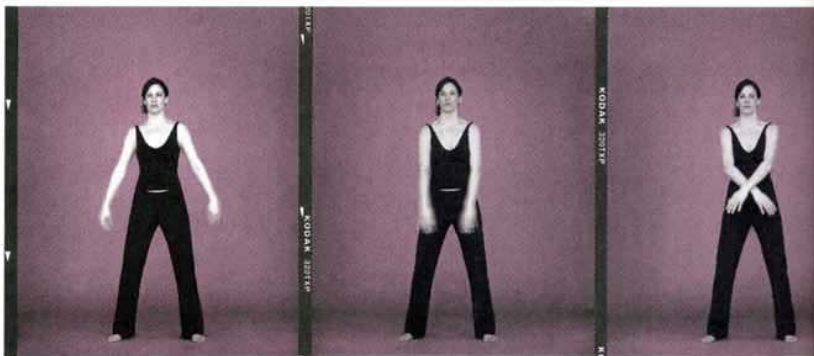
What it does: Stimulates qi in the spleen, liver, and kidneys. The twisting movement of the torso helps open the flow of qi, releasing tension and helping the body to relax and unwind.
How to do it: With your feet parallel and about shoulder-width apart, twist your upper body to the right, letting your arms swing out to the sides and flop loosely against your body. Reverse, swinging in the opposite direction, back and forth. Enjoy the easy rhythm of this movement.



2 separating clouds

balance your energy

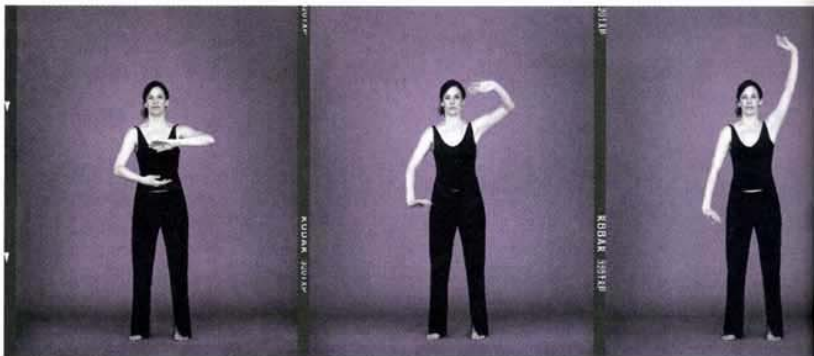
What it does: Balances yin energy and releases tightness by opening up the chest and shoulders.
How to do it: Stand with feet parallel, knees slightly bent, arms down. Cross your wrists and, as you inhale, slowly draw your arms up as you straighten your legs. When your arms reach overhead, open them out and down to the sides, creating a giant circle as you bend your knees and exhale. Repeat 3 to 5 times, and then reverse the arms, drawing them up on the sides and down in front of you.



3 swan stretches her wings

soothe your spirit

What it does: Helps balance the liver and spleen while stimulating the horizontal and vertical axes of the body.
How to do it: Start with palms facing each other as if holding an imaginary ball, left hand on top. Inhale and flip the left palm up, stretching one arm up and one down without locking the elbow. Exhale as you return arms to your center, holding the imaginary ball again, now with the right hand on top. Inhale and reverse the stretch. Repeat 3 times.

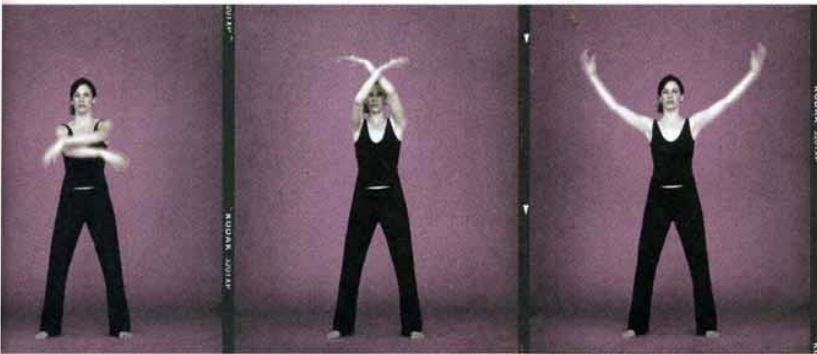
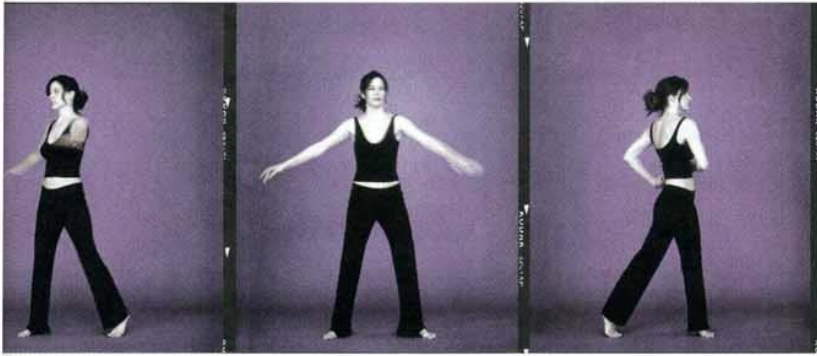


4 fluffing white clouds

harmonize your hormones

What it does: This exercise stimulates proper endocrine gland function, which supports all systems of the body, particularly those systems that regulate sleep.
How to do it: Stand with feet parallel and knees slightly bent. Rest your hands open at your sides with palms facing front. As you inhale, straighten your knees and lift your hands with palms facing up and elbows bent. As you exhale, turn your palms over and let your arms flow down to your sides, bending the knees. Repeat 6 times.





WARDROBE STYLING BY SARAH PARLOW
HAIR AND MAKEUP BY JENNIFER MARTIN, FOR ROSANNE RENFROW

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soothing massage clear the senses + calm the spirit

What it does: Grounds and settles you while refocusing scattered energy. Sishencong, which soothes a point on the crown of your head, addresses headache, nervousness, and insomnia; mingmen helps strengthen the kidneys and draw energy into your center of gravity, creating a sense of calm.

sishencong qi massage

How to do it: Lying on your back in bed, put one hand on top of your head and begin to move it in a circular motion about 2 inches in diameter. As you gently massage this point, visualize all your thoughts transforming into one. Put your other hand on your belly to help ground yourself more in your body. Continue for 3 to 5 minutes.

mingmen massage

How to do it: Mingmen is a point on your lower back, between the kidneys and behind your belly button. Turn onto your side, in fetal position. Make a loose fist and massage yourself at this mingmen point with a circular motion, 30 times in one direction and 30 times in the other. Counting can help you relax and fall asleep. If you're still awake after a few minutes, repeat the exercise, and then rest your hand by your side and notice the sense of calm you feel.

