

# Why a Personal Energy Management Practice Matters



# About the Chi Gung Theory in this Book

Chi gung (or qigong) is the art and science of cultivating your internal energy (also referred to as chi or life-force), developed over thousands of years in Chinese culture and medicine. The chi gung theory in this book comes from my teacher, Taoist Lineage Holder Bruce Frantzis, who has built a bridge between East and West through decades of in-depth study in Asia. I'm walking across the bridge that he built, to try to present authentic concepts in terms that are easy-to-understand and demystified.



# The Basic Choice

When it comes to your energy, you have an important choice to make: cultivate it or let your natural capacity run its course. It's the choice between Personal Energy Management or Daily Accumulation of Stress (just think: PEM/DAS!).

Where you are in life, how much energy you were born with, and how you naturally recover from daily stress all influence how you feel. I'm going to show you how an energy management practice, like chi gung, can make all of these natural cycles more efficient. You'll learn how different practice techniques can stop the stress cycle before it sets into your system and even begin to reverse years of accumulated stress that sap your deep energetic reserves.



# What We Mean When We Say Energy

You probably use the word “energy” all the time to describe things that are not far out and esoteric. You have a much more intuitive sense of your own body energy than you might realize. For starters, just think of what “energy” meant at different times in your life.

When you were a baby, life was a cycle of eating, sleeping, pooping, and laughing. If you spend time around a newborn, you can clearly see the peaks and valleys of energy and rest. That's what we're talking about when we say energy.

Now think about your adolescence. Wasn't there a time you'd stay up all night watching movies or playing video games fueled by sugar and caffeine? The jolt of energy and stimulation you needed at that age isn't the same as the baby, and maybe, by now, you've passed out of that phase.....at least, I hope so.

Maybe you moved into a partying phase where video games in your basement were replaced by parties at bars. Different fuel, but same ups and downs: push hard, crash, go into zombie-recovery mode, then repeat.

So what are the phases of energy you go through now? When did staying home with a good book start to feel nourishing instead of agonizing because you wanted to go out and play?



What's the quality of the energy that you need for your daily adult responsibilities? If adolescence was all about shaking up a soda can and watching it burst with crazy kid energy, as an adult, you need to let that fizz out slowly. Adult work life, with long hours, 24/7 electronic stimulation, and complex relationships, requires a steady even flow of energy that you can draw on consistently and deep reserves for when you need to push.

How do you know if you have that kind of chi? And if you don't have it, how do you get it?

First, you have to recognize energetic patterns in your daily life.



# Patterns and Cycles

Starting to detect energetic patterns and cycles in your life can sound esoteric, but it's not. In the West it's common to think that energy talk sounds woo-woo and new-agey.

In The Expressiveness of the Body and the Divergence of Greek and Chinese Medicine, Shigehisa Kuriyama explains why, as a culture, it's hard for us to accept the Eastern view of the body and energy. Kuriyama traces two medical traditions back to their roots, trying to get at why they went in such different directions. Guess what a cornerstone of Kuriyama's argument is: dissection in the West and no dissection in the East put the two traditions on different paths.

Think about that. If you cut away skin, and you see muscle and bone, won't you start thinking about pulleys and levers and start developing mechanical stories about how the body works? On the other hand, if you couldn't cut away the layers, how you would begin to sense what was going on under the surface? What models and stories would you develop that captured the global patterns you observed? This is the central issue that separates an analytic, reductionist approach from an intuitive, pattern-based approach.



As you embark on your own Personal Energy Management project, you need to take the empirical approach and make some observations about your daily energy flows.

- **Sleep:** How easy is it for you to go to bed at night or wake up in the morning? What's your wake/rest transition speed?
- **Illness:** How quickly do you recovery from a cold or the flu?
- **Food:** Observe your eating/digestion/elimination cycle. Does “food coma” kick in every time you eat? When was the last time you had a good bowel movement? I'm not kidding! This is a key piece of information for taking stock of your energy levels.
- **Work:** Think about weekly and even yearly cycles of work and rest or vacation. Do you recharge with two days off? Do a couple of weeks a year give you the juice to complete your annual workflow? I'm sure you sense patterns, annual, quarterly, on a project basis, in your professional field. Why not develop the same sense of flow for your own personal energy levels?



# The Brain Eats the Body



There's one major force working against you as you get to know your energetic patterns and cycles. Almost everything we are taught to do in school growing up utilizes that part of your mind and most of us equate our professional worth, to some degree, with our ability to be sharp analytically. That's fine for some things, but in the chi gung world there is a saying that my teacher is very fond of: *"The brain eats the body."*

Too much mental work can literally suck up the chi of your body, stealing energy from much needed rest and recovery processes. Is your brain eating your body? Here are some key signs:

- your neck feels tight, especially around the base of the throat
- your head heats up as you work
- your eyes are too tense to touch
- you are often short of breath, just sitting around
- your primary sensory input is visual, to the point where you process other sense through images

If you experience any of these things, I'm sorry, I can't help you. Just kidding! Read on! We're going to talk a little bit more about your natural energetic constitution and then we'll look at strategies for disrupting stress and boosting your energy.





# The Energy You are Born With

Everyone is going to have slightly different energetic patterns and cycles. Part of the reason why lies in the chi gung concept of “Pre-birth and Post-birth chi”. Pre-birth chi is the energy you are born with, and post-birth chi is energy you build up throughout your life. Put another way, pre-birth chi is like money you inherit and post-birth chi is like money you earn. When it's time to spend money, it doesn't matter where it's coming from, it's money either way.

Only, in your bank account, it does matter where the money comes from. If you need more money than you've inherited, and you're not earning it, you're going to go broke.

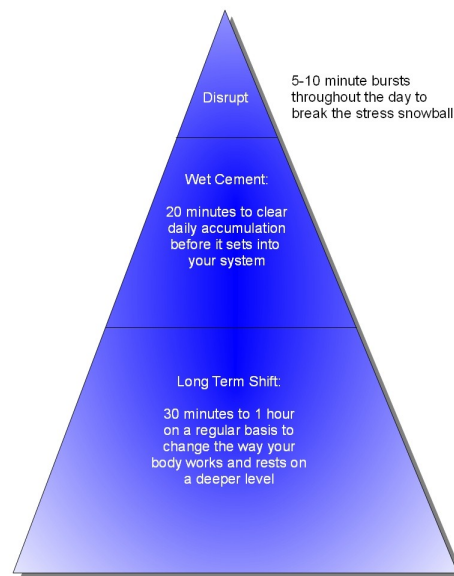
When you get up in the morning and say “ok, what do I feel like doing today?”, you are doing the energetic equivalent of looking in your wallet and saying, “right now, how much money do I have to spend?”

Your rest and recovery mechanisms are the interest rate you get on your savings. The higher the interest rate, the faster you replenish your reserves after periods of work and rest.

So what do you spend your chi on and how can you build more?



# 3 Layers of Personal Practice



When you take on a Personal Energy Management practice, you'll go through three distinct layers of practice.

## ***Disrupt Phase***

The Disrupt phase stems the snowball-like accumulation of stress as you go through your day. Done in 5-10 minute bursts, it keeps the effects of stress from compounding. As you get better at reading your own energy levels and work cycles, you'll get more strategic about disrupting the build-up of stress. I'll show you some Disrupt techniques in a couple of pages.



## ***Wet Cement Phase***

You may not know it, but you might already have a Wet Cement practice. This is how you intuitively deal with “the brain eating the body”. Is there something you do on a fairly regular basis to clear out the effects of the work day so it doesn't set into your system?

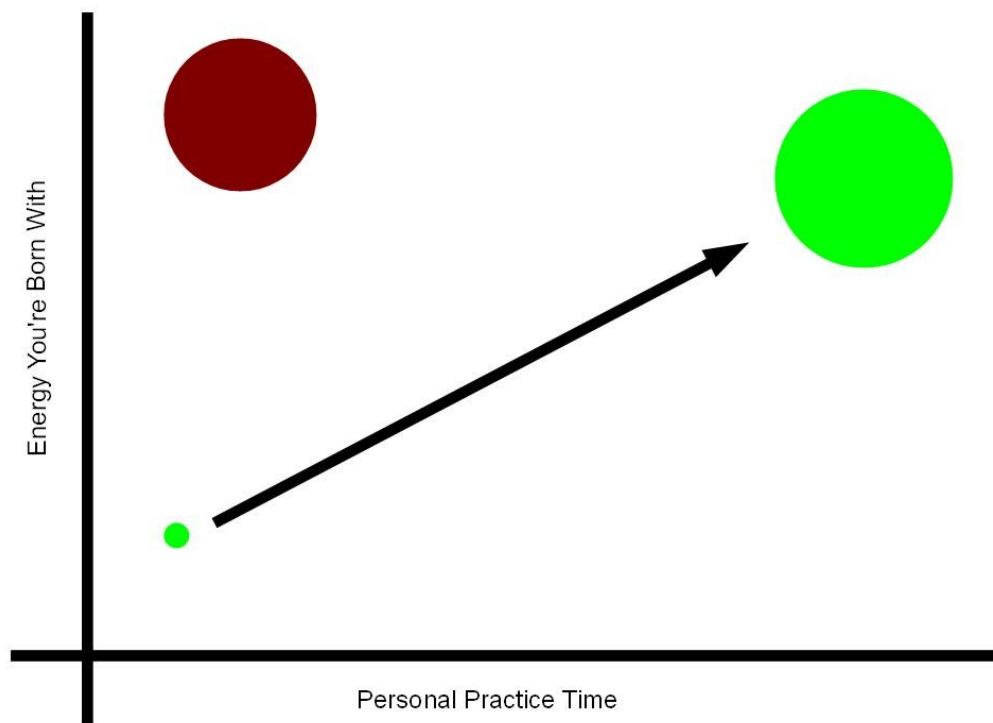
By getting to stress before it cements, you aid your recovery phases. A good Wet Cement practice needs to get you out of your head and using your whole body (no watching TV on the treadmill at the gym!). The next time you “blow off steam” after work, notice how that feeling shifts as you release the pressure valve. Typically, this will take 20 minutes or so to kick in.

## ***Long Term Shift***

Finally, as energy management becomes more ingrained, some people will naturally want to go deeper. Here's where the roots of chi gung and meditation take hold. We'll talk a little bit about the secret to diving deeply into a personal practice too.



# Pre-Birth Chi and Personal Practice Time



In this chart, we're looking at the impact personal practice and energy management has on your “daily juice” -- the size of each dot represents the amount of energy you have to get things done each day and your capacity to recover from strenuous work cycles.

The first person, represented by the red dot, was born with lots and lots of energy and as a result has a giant work and recovery capacity. Compare that to the green dot. That person was born with not nearly the same capacity and you



can see if they don't adopt a Personal Energy Management practice, they're going to “spend all their chi” a lot sooner than Ms. Red Dot.

However, if Green Dot begins to take on a regular practice, he can first reduce the impact of work and stress, and eventually, grow his capacity to work and recover, maybe even approaching the level of someone who has been given, as they say traditionally, “a gift from the gods”.



# The Secret Formula for Going Deeper

Before we get into 3 easy-to-implement Disrupt techniques, you need to know that there is a different type of awareness you need to employ to make the most of these practices. The secret to re-engaging the body in a healthy way is in this formula:

## **Thinking is to Feeling as Seeing is to Hearing**

You need to shift from thinking about your body to feeling your body to do chi gung well. This analogy will guide you, because the best way to tap into your feeling awareness and reverse the strain and drain cycles is to listen for what's going on, not look for it.



# Techniques to Disrupt the Stress Snowball

All of the following exercises are designed to break up the stress that accumulates throughout your work day.

**The method is simple: feel, soften, and then release specific parts of your body.**

We tend not to visualize, so no sitting on the beach in the Caribbean instead of sitting at your desk unless you're actually there! When it comes to body-centered practices, visualization just isn't as nourishing as feeling and it doesn't really reverse the process of *the brain eating the body*.

Your goal should be to sprinkle these exercises in throughout the day. Eventually, you will use them as a warm-up for deeper practice too, but start with small breaks.



# Disrupt Technique #1: Eye Massage



1. Press gently on your eyeballs with the tips of your fingers to gauge “hardness”: harder = more tension, softer = more relaxation\*
2. Start with small circles in place, on the upper lids
3. Move from the sides into the center and back out, working on 3 or 4 spots, doing several small circles in

each direction

4. Repeat on bottom lids
5. Repeat with the eyes in different positions, turning the eyes themselves, not the head, which gives you different access to the muscles that control the eyes

\*Pressure check: press a finger into your forearm and notice the deeper you push, the longer it takes for the color to return to your skin. The amount of pressure you need to use on the eyeballs is equivalent to NOT leaving a dot on your skin. Go super light!

**For a video explanation of this technique, visit:**

**<http://www.dankleiman.com/exercises/eye-massage/>**





## Disrupt Technique #2: Belly Breathing



1. Begin with one hand on your chest and one on your belly
2. Assess your natural breathing pattern, noting how much movement you have in the chest. When you activate deep abdominal breathing through good diaphragmatic movement, the chest will get quieter and the belly will fill with pressure from the movement of the diaphragm (this pressure and subsequent release massages the internal organs)
3. Focus on gently shifting your pattern to more belly movement and less chest movement. You don't need to force this shift, you'll watch it happen with practice. Pressing or straining to move the breath into the belly is counter-productive. We're trying to relax, right?

**To test whether you are actually using your diaphragm correctly, visit:**

**<http://www.dankleiman.com/exercises/belly-breathing/>**



## Disrupt Technique #3: Ankle Circles



1. Balancing on one leg (hold a chair for support if necessary), begin by flexing and pointing from the ankle, like you are pressing the gas pedal on a car
2. Your toes should stay relaxed, because your toes are not your ankle! Instead, focus on moving the heel: as the heel drives down, the toes come up and as the heel goes up, the toes point down
3. Once you can move up and down smoothly, try moving the foot left to right, again focusing on the heel cue (which will be a much smaller movement)
4. From straight lines, move to circles in each direction
5. Repeat on other ankle

**A modified version of this technique is great for  
when you can't fall asleep:**

**<http://www.dankleiman.com/exercises/ankle-circles/>**



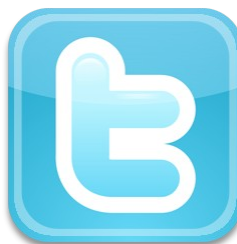
## What's next?

By experimenting with the Disrupt techniques and starting to recognize your unique patterns and cycles, you'll get on the path toward greater relaxation. If you get curious, you can dive into a life-long process of cultivating your personal energy. I hope you've seen how a little disruption can make a dent in your stress level. If you want to go deeper, I recommend finding a qualified instructor to guide you into this process.

I'm part of a network of well-trained chi gung instructors certified by Bruce Frantzis' Energy Arts. To find an Energy Arts instructor in your area, [visit their instructor directory](#).

You can find out more about what I teach and get weekly practice tips to keep you motivated through [Dankleiman.com](http://Dankleiman.com).

If you've found any of these concepts useful, interesting, or motivating, please take a minute and share them with your friends.



Thanks and enjoy a nourishing practice!

Dan

