

How Many People Practice Qigong in the U.S.?

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How many people are practicing qigong or mind-body exercises in the U.S.? This is a very challenging question. Three years ago I reported such an estimate based on the 2002 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS, an annual household health survey by the CDC), which included a special Alternative Health/Complementary and Alternative Medicine supplement with the Sample Adult Core component, and the Family Core component. In 2007, CDC repeated this supplement (with the support of National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine), which offers us an updated picture on how many adults in the U.S. are using mind-body therapies and other CAM practices. The supplemental questionnaire included questions on 27 various types of CAM therapies commonly used in the U.S. in 2002, This number expanded to 36 CAM therapies in 2007. Among them are Qigong and many other Qigong-related mind-body exercises, such as Tai Chi, deep breathing exercise, Yoga, Meditation and guided imagery. A total of 31,044 adults age 18 years and over were interviewed for this CAM supplement in 2002; and that number was 23,939 in 2007, representing a sample adult response rate of 74.3% in 2002, and 67.8% in 2007. According to the most recent report based on this survey, about 625,000 American adults (0.3%) have practiced qigong in the past 12 months, an 18.6% increase over 5 years ago (see Table 1).

Table 1. Frequencies and percents of adults 18 years and over who used complementary and alternative medicine by type of therapy: United States, 2002 and 2007

Therapy Type	2002		2007		Change
	Number in thousands	Percent (s.e.)	Number in thousands	Percent (s.e.)	Number in thousands (%)
Qigong in Narrow Sense					
Qigong (气功)	527	0.3 (0.04)	625	0.3 (.04)	+ 98 (18.6%)
Tai Chi (太极拳)	2,565	1.3 (0.08)	2,267	1.0 (0.08)	-298 (-11.6%)*
Qigong in Broad Sense					
Deep breathing exercise (吐纳)	23,457	11.6 (0.24)	27,794	12.7 (0.30)	+4,337 (18.5%)*
Yoga (瑜伽功)	10,386	5.1 (0.16)	13,172	6.0 (0.21)	+2,786 (26.8%)*
Meditation (静坐)	15,336	7.6 (0.20)	20,541	9.4 (0.27)	+5,205 (33.9%)*
Guided Imagery (观想)	4,194	2.1 (0.10)	4,866	2.2 (0.16)	+ 672 (16.0%) *
Energy healing/Reiki (灵气)	1,080	0.5 (0.05)	1,216	0.5 (0.06)	+136 (12.6%)

* $p < 0.01$

Some people may not agree with the way I include mind-body exercises like Yoga, guided imagery and deep breathing exercise as categories of Qigong. Therefore, I would like to clarify the concept and definition of Qigong that we are talking about here. “Qigong” is really a broad concept in Chinese that covers a variety of energy therapies and mind-body exercises. It is defined in a Chinese medical qigong textbook as follows, “Qigong refers to the mind-body operational skills and techniques that integrate the adjustments (regulations) of mind, body and breathing into Oneness.”(Liu, 2005) Historically, the mind-body exercises we call “Qigong” today have been called many different names by different traditions or schools, among those well-known terms include “Tu-na” (吐纳, exhalation and inhalation,) “Jin-zuo” (静坐, sitting meditation), “Cun-shi”(□□, mental visualization) , “Guan-xiang” (观想, observing imagination), “Dao-yin” (导引, guiding and conducting exercise), “An-qiao” (按跷, massaging or stepping on the body), and “Zuo-wang” (□□, sitting and forgetting). Today, all meditations and mind-body integrative exercises are being called “Qigong” in China. More specifically, Reiki was originated

from one of the Chinese medical qigong traditions, and Zen is one of the major Buddhism qigong traditions. Yoga could be called Indian qigong or Buddhist qigong in China. In the broad sense, we would include Reiki, Yoga, meditation, guided imagery and deep breathing exercise in this category of Qigong, which has a much larger proportion of users or practitioners in the U.S., about 19% of the population have practiced one form or other “Qigong” in the past year (note: these categories are not exclusive, and many people practiced more than one form).

If we compare the numbers in 2007 with those in 2002, we find that there have been increases in most forms of mind-body exercises in the past 5 years, except for Taiji, which experienced some decrease in practitioners. The largest increase occurred in meditation with 5 million more people practicing, or a 34% increase. The next largest increase occurred in Yoga, with 2.8 millions more practitioners, or 27% increased over 5 years ago. In addition, there is an 18.5% increase of Tu-na practitioners, 16% increase of Guan-xiang practitioners, and 12.6% increase in people who used Reiki or energy healing. This is really a very impressive upward trend in the past 5 years.

Something new in the 2007 NHIS was the survey on children under 18 years of age who used CAM therapies in the past 12 months. With a nationally representative sample of 9,417 children aged 0-17, the highest proportion of mind-body exercise among children is deep breathing exercise (1.56 millions or 2.2%), the next is yoga (1.5 millions or 2.1%), and then meditation (725 thousands or 1.0%).

Who were those people who practiced these mind-body exercises? Table 2 presents the demographic characteristics of those who used selected mind-body therapies both in 2002 and in 2007.

Table 2. Age-adjusted percentages of adults 18 years and over who used selected CAM categories during the past 12 months, by selected characteristics: United States, 2002 and 2007.

Selected Characteristic	Any use of Mind-body therapies (%)	
	2002	2007
Total	16.9 (0.31)	19.2 (0.38)
Sex		
Male	12.5 (0.36)	14.4 (0.44)
Female	21.1 (0.42)	23.8 (0.53)
Age		
18-29 years	17.7 (0.62)	21.3 (0.92)
30-39 years	18.3 (0.57)	19.9 (0.81)
40-49 years	18.9 (0.59)	19.7 (0.81)
50-59 years	19.6 (0.67)	22.9 (1.00)
60-69 years	14.4 (0.70)	17.3 (0.88)
70-84 years	9.4 (0.58)	11.9 (0.69)
85 years and over	6.4 (1.14)	9.8 (1.58)
Race		
White, single race	17.0 (0.35)	21.4 (0.49)
Black or African American, single race	14.7 (0.69)	14.8 (0.76)
Asian, single race	20.9 (1.67)	23.3 (5.68)
Education		
Less than high school	8.0 (0.46)	7.6 (0.56)
High school graduate/GED	12.4 (0.46)	12.1 (0.53)
Some college – no degree	19.1 (0.60)	22.0 (0.84)
Associate degree	20.2 (0.92)	24.3 (1.26)
Bachelor degree	25.0 (0.79)	25.5 (0.85)

Graduate degree	26.5 (1.55)	34.2 (1.34)
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Similar to the previous report, females are more likely to use CAM mind-body exercises than males; and educated people are more likely to use mind-body therapies than less educated people. All age groups have reported increased proportions of use. Asian-Americans reported a higher proportion of using mind-body exercises than other races; and both Asian and White races reported a significant increase of use in the past 5 years, but not so among African Americans. Hispanics have the lowest proportion in use of mind-body exercises (10.6%). In addition, those with private insurance are more likely to use these exercises (22.0%) than those with public insurance (18.7%) or those without insurance (16.2%); those who have been hospitalized in the past year are more likely to use mind-body exercises (23.7%) than those who did not (18.8%); and those who were delayed for conventional care because could not afford it are more likely to use (27.7%) than those who did not (18.2%). The more healthy conditions one has, the more likely she/he would use some form of mind-body exercises (range from 9.8% in those with 0 condition, to 16.2% in those with 1-2 conditions, to 30.6% of those with 6 or more conditions). People on the western coast are more likely to use mind-body exercises (23.2%) than other regions, while people in the south region have the lowest proportion in using mind-body exercises (15.0%).

For complete reports of the CDC NHIS, please go to web site:
<http://www.cdc.gov/nchs/data/nhsr/nhsr012.pdf>

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