



WAKE UP—AND DON'T SMELL THE COFFEE

Three chemical-free ways to get revved up in the morning >> by BETH LEVINE



AS far as I'm concerned, the most obnoxious pairing of words in the English language is the phrase *Good morning*. Separately, each word is fine. But say them together while I'm still in bed, and you can expect a pillow flung at your head, along with some heartfelt epithets. So, in the hope of saving my husband, son and dog from having to deal with my early AM crankiness (and surprisingly strong pitching arm), I concocted an experiment: I would test three ancient Eastern ways of tapping internal energy in order to wake up faster every day. Why not just go with caffeine? Because I wanted the change to come from within, not from a dose of joe. Here, on a scale of one (worst) to five (best) coffee cups, is my rating of how well each program fared.

» PRANAYAMA (BREATHING)

Studies have repeatedly shown that pranayama, yogic breathing sometimes coupled with simple stretches, is effective at lowering the heart rate and reducing anxiety. A few years back, researchers at the University of Oxford in England found that this practice can also improve people's get-up-and-go. According to the researchers' report in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, one 30-minute session of pranayama "had a markedly invigorating effect on [subjects'] perceptions of both mental and physical energy, and increased high positive mood."

Since there are many forms of pranayama, I consulted Larissa Hall Carlson, the breathing specialist at Kripalu

Center for Yoga and Health in Stockbridge, Massachusetts, to find out which methods would best help me achieve my goal of feeling more energetic at wake-up time. Carlson recommended her own morning routine, which consists of three types of breathing, and was kind enough to demonstrate each of them for me over Skype. "The combination of techniques stimulates body and mind by bringing more oxygen into the bloodstream, gradually increasing lung capacity and helping to reduce nasal congestion," she explains.

THE PROGRAM

TOTAL TIME | About five minutes

EFFECTIVENESS TIP | Inhale and exhale through the nose, never the mouth.

☛ THREE-PART BREATH (OR DIRGHA BREATH)

Carlson likes to do this one when she first awakens and is still lying in bed. (I like the lying-in-bed part, too.) This way of breathing may come easily to those who have studied yoga but may take some practice for others. The technique: You inhale very slowly and deeply, consciously directing the air first to your belly, making it inflate like a balloon, then into your middle chest so that your ribs expand and then into the upper part of your lungs, below your collarbone. When you are completely full, don't hold your breath; exhale slowly, starting with the air in your upper chest, in a reversal of your three-part inhalation. Do 6 to 10 reps.

☛ **STANDING SUN BREATH** Stand. As you inhale, raise your arms out to your sides, then over your head, pressing your palms lightly together as if you are praying. Then exhale, keeping your hands together as you bring them down the centerline to your midsection and stopping when your hands pass your heart. Do 6 to 10 reps.

☛ **SQUATTING SUN BREATH** Stand, holding your palms together in front of your heart. As you inhale, bring your arms up the centerline, stopping when they are overhead. Exhale and bring your arms first out to your sides and then into a prayer position, with palms together while you also bend your knees into a gentle squat (yoga's chair posi-

tion). As you inhale, keep your palms together and bring arms up the centerline until they are overhead as you also stand up. Exhale. Do 6 to 10 reps.

MY RATING: 

This is a very good, simple routine—slow and gentle but effective. Increasing my oxygen intake sweeps the cobwebs out of my brain, and the slight stretching helps work out the morning kinks. I woke up vaguely headachy one day, and this exercise actually reduced my discomfort.

For more explicit instructions, try Carlson's CD, *Ayurvedic Pranayama and Meditation for the Doshas* (shop.kripalu.org). For demonstrations of the three-part breath and the two techniques that follow, do-in and Qigong, go to more.com/energyvideo.

☛ DO-IN (SELF-MASSAGE)

I am a tired, bedraggled mess when I show up at Enrique Ramirez's Face to Face NYC-Day Spa to learn how to perform do-in, an ancient blend of touching and breathing. After I leave, as light as a feather and dancing down the street, I ask myself, Am I peppy because this technique is so energizing? Or because my body really approved of having a man as attractive as Ramirez dabble with my pressure points? I withhold my judgment until I can try this technique by myself the next morning.

Do-in (aka *dao yin*) is a form of Chinese acupressure, but you don't have to learn the whole map of pressure points. The idea is to get your blood flowing by pressing your hands or fingers on various spots of your body. At the same time, you increase your oxygen intake via steady breathing.

There are few scientific studies on the effectiveness of do-in as an energy booster, but there are encouraging findings on a related technique: massage. For instance, a study conducted by Tiffany Field, PhD, director of the Touch Research Institute at the University of Miami School of Medicine, confirmed that being massaged made subjects more alert and relaxed. "Stimulation

of pressure receptors under the skin seems to cause the heart rate to slow, and slowed heart rate is associated with increased attentiveness," Field explains. Since do-in is a form of self-massage, I figure it should have similar results.

THE PROGRAM

TOTAL TIME | 10 minutes

EFFECTIVENESS TIP | Apply pressure for three counts. Inhale with each press; exhale with the release.

☛ **FACE AND HEAD** Using the tips of your fingers, press near your temples, underneath the browbones. Then press on your closed eyes (take out your contacts first!), down the sides of the nose and at the point where your upper and lower jaw meet. Pinch the bridge of your nose. Then pull down on your earlobes. Ramirez says this ear tug has the bonus of eliminating food cravings. (Jury's out on that one.) With one hand, pull your head down to your chest. Then pull your head side to side. With each pull, press on the exposed part of the neck.

☛ **ARMS AND HANDS** Squeeze the inside of one arm, using the full palm of your opposite hand, starting near your shoulders and moving downward toward your wrists. Moving on to your hand, press your way up each finger, starting at its base and ending by tugging on that finger. Pull hand back and up and then forward and under. Repeat on the other side.

☛ **BACK** Press on your lower back, above your hip bones, with either the thumbs or palms of both hands.

☛ **FRONT** Lie on your back. Apply pressure on the left lower quadrant of your abdomen with a flat palm (which stimulates your colon), then under the rib cage on the right (liver) and under the rib cage in the middle (stomach).

☛ **LEGS AND FEET** Squeeze the top of one knee with a full hand. Then, using your fingertips, press behind the knee, down your calf and then on both sides of the Achilles tendon. Use your thumb to press into the arch of your foot. Press between each toe bone with your thumb and then pull each toe. Repeat on the other side. ☛

MY RATING: 

How do I feel after trying this by myself? While I am not floating, as I was post-Ramirez, I do feel really good. I am less sluggish and grouchy, and my bones and muscles aren't as creaky. I actually do some yard work before popping into the shower—a big change from most mornings, when I'm happy if I manage to make the bed.

For more instruction, get the new book *Fountain of Youth Exercises* by Naomi Sophia Call.

» QIGONG (HEALING MOTIONS)

Qigong (the word is Chinese for “energy cultivation”) uses flowing, graceful movements to help you focus on body, breath and mind.

If you've seen someone perform Tai Chi, you have a good idea of what Qigong (aka Chi Kung) looks like. However, Qigong is less exacting, notes Ken Dolan, a practitioner who works with patients

in the Bennett Cancer Center at Stamford Hospital in Connecticut. “It has sets of movement, but they aren't as choreographed into a particular sequence you have to follow precisely, as Tai Chi is,” he says. The basic idea: You slowly move your arms across and over your body, all the while breathing deeply, often twisting the hips slightly and stepping in various directions.

Research shows that Qigong and Tai Chi can improve practitioners' bone health, fitness and balance, though no one has yet studied their possible invigorating effects. Still, experts who've worked with clients have found evidence of these benefits. “Qigong can take you out of the fogginess of the sleep cycle into the awake cycle. It's like jump-starting your body in the morning,” says Roger Jahnke, director and chief instructor at the Institute of Integral Qigong and Tai Chi in Santa Barbara, California. “Qigong and Tai Chi were developed specifically to maximize energy.”

THE PROGRAM

TOTAL TIME | Ideally, you should set aside 30 to 60 minutes. But if you can't manage that first thing in the morning, Jahnke says, you'll still reap energizing benefits from a 10-minute session (if you have time, repeat five more sessions throughout the day).

EFFECTIVENESS TIP | To keep your mind quiet, practice in a pleasant, neutral place; outdoors, in nature, is best. If your thoughts stray into “I can't believe we have to spend our vacation money on a new furnace” territory, tell yourself, “Not now,” and pull your mind back to the present.

The illustrations below show a few movements that are part of a sequence called Awakening the Chi (*Chi* means “energy”). You can easily locate videos of simple sequences on the Internet, or you can find local teachers on the Institute of Integral Qigong and Tai Chi website (instituteofintegralqigongandtaichi.org).

MY RATING: 

I found the Qigong practice surprisingly energizing. It may feel as if you aren't doing much, but the flow of continuous movement gets your blood going and shakes out the creaks; the breathing increases the oxygen level in your body; and the mindfulness draws you into a state of alertness. By the time I'm finished, thoughts of bed are long forgotten, and I'm ready to roll.

THE FINAL WORD

For me, all three of these techniques were effective. I'm still using them, and whichever I choose, I get more done in the morning because I am alert and ready to take on the day rather than half-awake and schlumping around, waiting for inspiration to strike. But let's not get crazy here: I've been doing exercises, not having a lobotomy. I'm still no Little Mary Sunshine in the morning—more like Mary Partly Sunny with a 10 Percent Chance of Rain. “We'll take it!” my husband and son exclaimed after I finished my experiment. The dog didn't say much, but I'm pretty sure he agreed. 🐕

QIGONG WAKE-UP

THIS BASIC SERIES is part of a warm-up sequence called Awakening the Chi. The intention is to move Chi (energy) up from and then back to the *dantian*, a point two finger widths below the navel that's the body's center of gravity and balance. Do all these actions very slowly; breathe in and out very deeply.



» **STAND WITH** your feet shoulder-width apart, arms hanging by your sides, knees slightly bent, palms facing toward your body, fingers slightly curled in and eyes looking ahead



» **PLACE YOUR HANDS** in front of a point two fingers width below navel, palms facing up, fingers almost touching. Breathing in, raise hands to the chest, palms still facing up.



» **BREATHING OUT**, turn your hands around so they face the ground, then lower hands to where you started, below the navel. Repeat the arm movements 6 to 8 times.