

A rounded approach to wellbeing

Give your mind and body a helping hand with the healing power of ChiBalls.

Monica Linford and Susan Woodd explain

Achieving a state of balance between mind, body and spirit is no mean feat in the western world where our hectic personal and professional lives often require that we multi-task and make time for others.

The aim within Chinese medicine is for the human body to achieve a state of balance which include our thoughts, emotions and our essential vitality for life as well as the body itself. This is a contrast to the Western approach that until recently, has focused its attention solely on the body that's often considered to be healthy only when there's no evidence of disease.

What is it?

Based on a holistic exercise programme that employs Oriental medicine, the ChiBall Method™ studies the basic elements of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) to understand how it translates into exercise and how when taught from this point of view, can bring complete balance and harmony to our mind, body and spirit.

There are four main aspects to TCM:

1. **The concept of yin and yang** — which is balance in all things.
2. **Chi** — vital energy which gives life to all things.
3. **The meridian system** — energy channels within the body through which chi travels to nourish and balance it.

4. **The five elements** — the way to live, work and exercise in harmony with the laws of nature.

The key to your wellbeing lies in how well you can appropriately align yourself to these laws and how you adapt physically, emotionally and mentally to the changes which occur continually in our surroundings, environment, temperate, social climates, relationships and the task in hand.

The ChiBall Method™ gives personal trainers a wealth of material with which to motivate, gain rapport with their clients and design unique individualised programmes. It uses a synergy of six exercise disciplines — a unique blend of east and west — to promote harmony, balance and wellbeing. Fitness instructors also have the opportunity to learn ancient concepts to apply to their established training in the fitness arena. In addition, the Method provides an ideal foundation in which to cross over into mind and body fitness and allows the participant to experience five distinct energy changes or transformations during the class, (the samenatural changes experienced through the daylight cycle) as they go through specifically chosen movements taken from six exercise disciplines (see below) in order to create personal balance.

These energy changes are as follows:

- To rise, move upwards and direct energy forwards
- To build heat, expand and disperse energy >

- To centre, stabilise and balance energy
- To consolidate energy and release the unwanted
- To relax, withdraw, cool down and replenish energy

In ancient texts, these five changes are referred to as the five elements of wood, fire, earth, metal and water energy respectively.

Using movement, breathing and concentration, the meridians are opened just like when an acupuncturist uses needles to access specific points to enhance the vitality of the meridian pathway. This, in turn, strengthens the organs and systems they govern.>

The emphasis, pace, style of each exercise or posture, which can also be adapted to any muscle group, organ or system that may need to be supported, enhanced or controlled because of being over active or hypertonic, alters according to the time of day or season we're in.

Body benefits

An authentic ChiBall class integrates six exercise systems which aim to do the following:

- 1. Tai chi-qi gong** — slowly awakens and stimulates chi, grounds the body, trains the mind and regulates the breath.
- 2. ChiBall dance** — releases negative or stagnant energy, detoxifies, increases oxygen supply to muscles, boosts metabolism and encourages self-expression.
- 3. Yoga** — develops strength, balance and deeper mind/body communication. Promotes self-awareness and inner stability.
- 4. Pilates** — for core strength, graceful movements, concentration and a strong sense of centre.
- 5. Feldenkrais** — for total relaxation through yielding effortlessly and intuitively to new suggestions while learning to let go of movements that no longer serve you.
- 6. Relaxation and meditation technique** — dissolves tension, calms the mind, reduces negative emotions and relaxes, restores and revives.

The ChiBalls used within the programme draw awareness to certain areas of the body, stimulating pressure points while regulating



the mind and emotions. They also provide an excellent aide to improving postural awareness and developing the ability and enjoyment of those with special needs.

Each of the six ChiBall colours are impregnated with an aromatherapy oil for mood enhancing effects:

- 1. Red** for energy, stamina, passion and vitality. Fragrance: cinnamon.
- 2. Orange** for confidence, playfulness, spontaneity, happiness and joy. Fragrance: sweet orange.
- 3. Yellow** for personal power, self-worth, self-knowledge, self-discipline and courage. Fragrance: lemongrass.
- 4. Green** for abundance, love, friendships, wealth and good health. Fragrance: geranium.
- 5. Blue** to restore courage, resourcefulness and will power. Fragrance: juniper berry.
- 6. Purple** for peace, inspiration, faith and recognition of our true nature. Fragrance: lavender.

Seasonal teaching

The aim of this method is to align participants with the seasonal and climatic changes.

In spring, movements and sequences that are slightly challenging, stimulate the breath and move chi through muscles, tendons and ligaments. Summer is the perfect season for more strenuous sequences which create heat, build strength and stimulate the metabolism.

Late summer focuses on centring both the mind and body using standing seated and supine postures, which improve core stability and strength.

As the year progresses, autumn takes on exercises which focus on breathing, massage and strengthen the elementary organs while also inducing a state of deep relaxation so that you can let go of long term habits that no longer work for you, while winter is a time for rejuvenation and reflection. Here, t'ai chi is used to calm the mind and spirit, cultivate internal warmth and boost kidney chi — your energy bank account. Warming yoga postures that flex, extend and rotate the spine and help rejuvenate the kidneys are followed by deep breathing, relaxation and meditative mind training to balance the emotions.

A typical summer class

The organs in focus are the heart, small intestine, pericardium (the membrane around the heart) and the triple heater (which governs the fascia and thermal regulation).

Energy management

As nature peaks with vibrant energy, it's no coincidence that the desire to have fun,

be outdoors, be more spontaneous and physically motivated is also intensified.

However, if you overexert this vibrant uplifting energy by overtraining, overworking and playing all hours, burn-out is likely to be the result. Eastern advice for this time of year is to work hard but rest well too, so include some fun sporting activities, calming yoga retreats and indulge in plenty of massage and many hours reclining on those padded sun loungers.

Personal trainers

Late summer is an ideal phase to implement new training strategies for your clients or encourage weight-loss programmes. Keep the training spontaneous, encourage brisk walking or cycling and activities that stimulate the circulation and dissolve tension.

Group exercise

Use the ChiBall class at this time of year to move, stimulate, have fun and liberate the body from stiffness and tension so that participants are able to unwind, release and completely relax. The format includes 10 minutes of t'ai chi, 25 minutes of ChiBall aerobics dance followed by standing yoga postures, 10 minutes of Pilates, 15 minutes of Feldenkrais-based exercises and finally, 5 minutes of relaxation to complete the class.

If teaching late in the summer, the class format changes by aiming to balance, centre and strengthen the core. The session would include 15 minutes of t'ai chi to root and ground the body, 10 minutes of stationary yoga to promote inner concentration and improve stability, 30 minutes of Pilates and 5 minutes of relaxing Feldenkrais-based exercises to disperse, integrate and assimilate the previous exercises. 1

An example of a late summer ChiBall class

