

KNEE WARM-UP

By Margaret Emerson

Knee injuries are regrettably common among martial artists and people in general. They're stubborn and slow to heal. Using massage and self-applied acupressure, this exercise nourishes the knee with blood and qi. It can speed the repair process and, better yet, prevent injuries from occurring. My T'ai Chi students and I have been using it successfully for about twenty years. Arthritis sufferers find that it relieves pain and makes knees more mobile.

The exercise takes only a few minutes. I use it every day before stretching (the few knee problems I've had, have come from overstretching); I also use it before running, doing T'ai Chi, and to renew my knees midway through a long hike. It's not unusual for me to do this exercise several times a day. My students and I have a lot of well-earned faith in the knee warm-up.

You can do this while standing, sitting on the edge of a chair, or sitting on the floor. If you're standing, start with feet parallel, facing front. Shift the weight to one leg, rotate the empty foot out 45°, and bend the knee. (This position can be hard on the lower back.) If you're sitting on the floor, sit with both legs comfortably out in front. Bend one leg slightly at the knee and begin. Standing or sitting, it's important that there's no weight on the leg and the knee is bent.

If you have arthritis or a damaged knee, you may want to start the day by throwing your legs over the side of the bed in the morning and running through the process before you even stand up. Your knees will feel more fluid and lubricated.

1. Massage:

Rub the knee up and down lightly with both hands—front to back 12 times, and then side to side 12 times. Repeat this as many times as you like. I normally do it twice.

Using massage and self-applied acupressure, this exercise nourishes the knee with blood and qi.

2. Acupressure:

First you'll apply pressure to 2 symmetrical points simultaneously. I call them the "crazy points" because when we were kids, we'd grab each other there to make the person jump. One is located about 3 finger breadths above the upper *inner* edge of the knee cap. This point is known by acupuncturists as *Spleen 10* and treats pain in the knee. The second point is about 3 finger breadths above the upper *outer* edge of the knee cap. Known as *Stomach*

34, this one relieves swelling, pain, and stiffness in the knee. Like all the acupressure points used in this exercise, they're recognizable by how sensitive they are. After using the 3 finger breadths to locate the general area, move around to find the *most* sensitive spot. Dig in with thumbs or middle fingers and massage both points in a circular motion twelve times. I usually circle 24 times, but you can repeat as many times as you like for up to 2 to 3 minutes.

The next point is located on the inside of the leg at the fold of the knee. With one finger, press upward



Acupressure point Liver 8

against the bone between 2 tendons. Bending the knee more helps to find the tendons. Feel around for the most sensitive—even painful—spot. This point is designated *Liver 8*; it alleviates pain and stiffness in the knee. Massage in a circle 12 times. Repeat as many times as you like for up to 2 to 3 minutes. Again, I usually circle 24 times.

Find the "hole" or depression in the knee below and to the outside of the kneecap. Measure 4 finger breadths down from the bottom edge of the hole to find this point—*Stomach 36*. It's close to the shinbone—about one finger breadth away from the crest. Massage as directed for the other points. This one is known as the "three-mile point." The Chinese say that if you walk three miles and then rub this point, you can walk another three miles. Massaging here improves range of motion and also treats numbness and pain in the leg. *Stomach 36* is considered one of the most important acupressure points in the body. Traditional Chinese medicine teaches that, among other things, it harmonizes the intestines, regulates qi, strengthens the immune system, and acts as a general tonic.



Acupressure points *Stomach 34* (left) and *Spleen 10* (right)

Qi Department: Taijiquan



Pre-T'ai Chi knee warm-up

3. Massage again

Go back to lightly massaging the knee front to back 12 times and side to side 12 times. Repeat as many times as you like. I normally do this only once.

I was first shown this procedure by Wasentha Young at a Pacific Associa-



Acupressure point Stomach 36

tion of Women Martial Artists' training camp in the early 1990s. John Yamas, O.M.D., L.Ac. and Marlene Smith, L.Ac. added to my understanding of the acupressure points, their uses, and how to find them. I also consulted *The Acupressure Atlas* by Bernard Kolster, M.D. and Astrid Waskowiak, M.D., as well as the online sources TCM Discovery and Acufinder. ■

Margaret Emerson has been practicing T'ai Chi, qigong, and meditation since 1979 and teaching since 1989. She lives in Arcata, California where she also writes and paints. Her books are Breathing Underwater: The Inner Life of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, A Potter's Notes on Tai Chi Chuan, and Eyes of the Mirror, a memoir. She is a contributor to the book Martial Arts Teachers on Teaching, also to Qi Journal, Black Belt Magazine, and Aikido Today. Her new video is "Wu T'ai Chi, Kao Style: As Practiced and Taught by Margaret Emerson." Margaret's Web site is www.margaretemerson.com. You can also reach her at (707) 822-6508.

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