

# Rolling chime balls are an ancient wellness aid

► Continued from Page H1

Illness or disease is a result of the blocking of the flow of chi, or unbalanced chi.

Chinese health balls are only one of many traditional wellness practices. Others include tai chi, a slow and concentrated type of exercise; qi gong, another exercise routine that works on chi; acupuncture, in which needles are inserted into the body at very specific spots, and accupressure, a type of massage also focused on specific spots. These practices all help people to keep their energy balanced and moving, says Zhao, who is a certified tai chi master and accupressure therapist.

"Chinese medicine is more prevention," says Zhao. "Chinese people look at our bodies as our garden. We take care of the soil first. We focus on the basic part, the chi, the life force. We focus on the food we eat, and the exercise we are doing, and the time we sleep, all the regular things."

Another basic principle that keeps Chinese health balls rolling is that using them on the hands and the feet stimulates the many nerve endings and blood vessels located there, says Zhao.

The hands and the feet are also where the body's energy channels, or meridians, begin or end, so using the Chinese health balls here can stimulate chi, says Zhao.

There also are zones and reflex areas in the hands and feet that correspond to all parts of the body, which is the basis for the practice of reflexology. "We will

use the balls to do reflexology on ourselves," Zhao tells her class.

To work on the bladder and kidneys, she demonstrates how to roll a ball across the instep of the foot in a "J" shape. The area under the little toe corresponds to the shoulder, she says. You can work on your neck by massaging beneath the big toe.

"When we want to stimulate the life force, the hands and feet are the most convenient place for people to work on themselves," says Zhao.

In a modern twist, Zhao says she's found that golf balls are a good, if not superior, substitute for the traditional health balls made of metal or jade or stone. "Golf balls are exactly the right size," she says. "Not big, not small. To press on the accupressure points, the golf balls work better, especially on the feet."

Zhao, who lives in Bethlehem Township, came to the United States from mainland China in 1995 as part of a scholar exchange program between Tianjian University of Commerce near Beijing and Northampton Community College.

In China, she taught physics and did research in nutrition and the human body. After earning a master's degree in business administration at Oklahoma City University, she taught hotel management and wrote a textbook on the subject. Her mother is a professor of medicine; her father is a surgeon and a former hospital president.

Now Zhao and partner Steve Zhang, a certified accupressurist,

own Authentic Eastern Health L.L.C. in Bethlehem Township; they offer accupressure massage, tai chi and other Chinese culture classes there and at various locations. Besides Easton Hospital, classes are held at Northampton Community College, St. Luke's Hospital and nursing homes.

Americans are becoming more familiar with traditional Chinese medicine, says Zhao. "I see a big difference. Now they ask me how my chi is doing."

Winnie Pearsall has been taking courses with Zhao for the past six years. "I try to do tai chi every day. I took it to help my balance because I had a hip replacement," says the Forks Township resident.

"I think the health balls are marvelous for the dexterity and flexibility of your hands," she adds. "I'm 78, and you have to do these things a lot to keep them going. Also, when you are trying to do the balls in your hands and under your feet at the same time, it calls for real concentration. Your mind is completely involved in it."

Pearsall admits that she was skeptical when she heard about chi for the first time. "But when I got into it and found out about the mind-body connection, and how chi affects you physically, I was surprised that, yes, I do feel the chi, the energy that involves the mind and the body," she says. "I'm pleased with the whole thing."

Barbette R. Weimer-Elder, director of organization development for Easton Hospital, says the hospital is offering classes

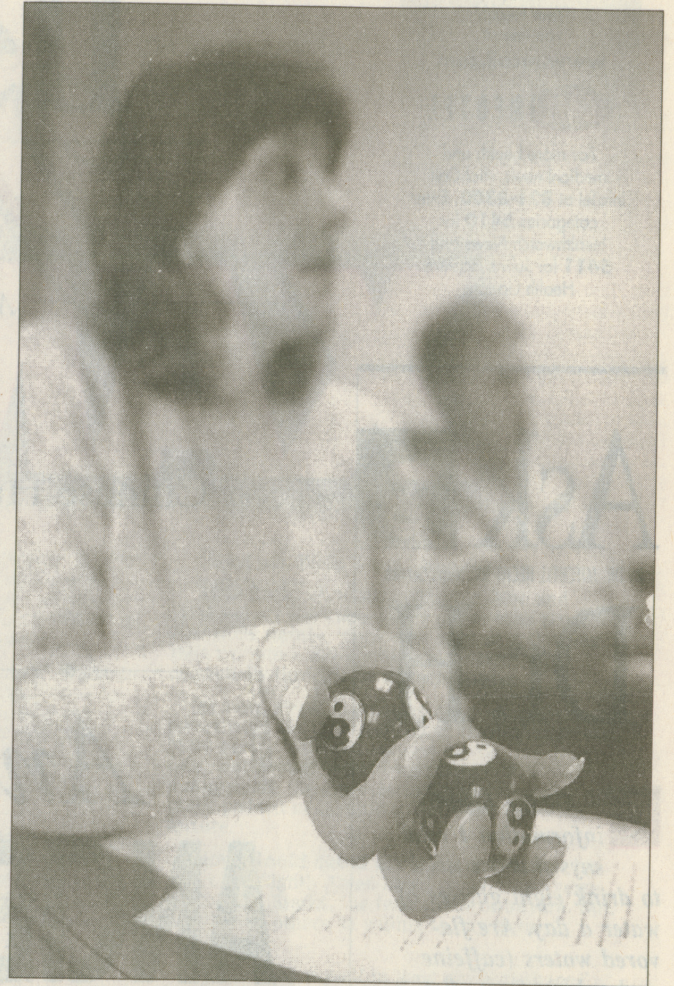
such as the Chinese wellness series because people have asked for them. "People who come to the classes say they like them," she says.

"Almost all of these exercise forms emphasize the inner balance of the Chinese concept of energy," says Dr. Stanley Walker, an internist and acting chief of geriatrics at Easton Hospital.

As to the outer balance of energy, on-going tai chi classes offered by the hospital in a program separate from the wellness series are providing preliminary data on the positive effects of tai chi on the improvement of balance and preventing falls in the seniors age group, says Dr. Walker.

"I think that we are all getting more used to the fact that medicine is multi-faceted, and we are getting involved with preventive medicine and thoughts of how the mind can help the body in multiple ways," he says. "I think that all the alternative medicines have a role, certainly in prevention, and in making patients feel good, which has a big role in longevity and making them feel happier and stronger."

**Where to get them:** Chinese health balls are sold locally at the Arts of Asia Gift Gallery, Trolley Station Mall on Route 191 in Lower Nazareth Township, and Spencer Gifts in the Lehigh Valley Mall. Sizes and materials vary; prices begin at around \$5.



CESAR L. LAURE / The Morning Call  
Janet Valvik of Bethlehem manipulates a pair of musical ying-yang decorated balls in her right hand during a class at Easton Hospital on the benefits of Chinese health balls.

Reporter Joanna Poncavage  
610-820-6754  
joanna.poncavage@mc.com