

the
power
of prana

BREATHE YOUR WAY
TO HEALTH AND VITALITY

MASTER STEPHEN CO

& ERIC B. ROBINS, MD

with **JOHN MERRYMAN**

authors of *Your Hands Can Heal You*



sounds true

BOULDER, COLORADO

Sounds True, Inc.,
Boulder, Colorado 80306

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Cover and book design by Rachael Murray
Printed in Canada

NOTE: You should check with your physician before starting this or any new exercise program or breathing routine. This is especially important if you have any preexisting health conditions, such as high blood pressure, migraines, or heart or lung ailments. **Women who are pregnant or think they might be pregnant should not perform the meditations and should check with their physician before performing any of the breathing or physical exercises.**

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Co, Stephen.

The power of prana : breathe your way to health and vitality / by Stephen Co and Eric B. Robins, MD, with John Merryman.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-1-60407-440-6 (pbk.) — ISBN 978-1-60407-467-3 (e-book)

1. Healing. 2. Vital force. I. Robins, Eric B. II. Merryman, John. III. Title.

RZ401.C596 2011

613.7'046—dc22

2011004844

eBook ISBN: 978-1-60407-467-3

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

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Introduction Why Do So Many People Have Low Energy?

People grumble about it constantly. Physicians hear it more than any other complaint. We now even have a variety of very popular drinks to remedy it.

“It” is fatigue, sluggishness, low energy.

In a contemporary world where we have an abundance of conveniences and automation available to us, it seems we have much less of the two things that modern technology was supposed to give us more of: time and energy. Time management is a subject beyond my expertise (and I struggle with it at times myself), but I have spent a substantial portion of my career as a physician studying the topic of energy—and more specifically, the question: why do people have low energy?

Let me begin by addressing the root of the problem of low energy: our lack of understanding regarding the true nature of our energy, or what other cultures call our life force, *chi* (in China), or *prana* (in India).

It’s unfortunate that my own profession, Western medical science, has been perhaps the biggest stumbling block to a fuller comprehension of this life force. During my four years of medical school and six years of residency—and it wasn’t that long ago—we were taught next to nothing about the body’s energy. If a patient came in complaining of fatigue or low energy, we were instructed to take a full medical history and to run a number of tests to see if we could diagnose a medical cause for it, such as anemia, diabetes, hypothyroidism, sleep apnea, and so on. Of course, it is important to run such tests to rule out serious health problems, but every physician will tell you that, more often than not, such tests reveal nothing. All we can do in these cases is simply tell the patients that there

is nothing medically wrong with them, though some physicians will go so far as to tell someone the problem “is in your head,” or it’s “just stress,” which is just a convenient way to blame the patient for an illness that the physician can’t fully explain or “fix.” Patients often leave such an encounter feeling some sense of relief because they now know nothing serious is wrong, but they also go home largely unsatisfied, mainly because they’re going home still tired, still fatigued, still depleted. What they don’t realize is that Western medical science has no treatment to help people “get more energy.”

It’s because of such encounters, as well as the growing understanding—by the public and by enlightened physicians—of the limits of allopathic, or Western, medicine, that alternative medical treatments have become increasingly popular over the last several decades. And what is the major philosophical tenet underpinning most alternative medicine? It’s the belief that the body’s energy is not simply some theoretical concept or a verbal metaphor for physical prowess, but a real, tangible force.

Let me expand on this fundamental principle and offer what I see as the essential beliefs of alternative medicine, for these beliefs are also the basis for the energy-boosting routine you will read about in this book:

1. **The body heals itself.** Your body has a marvelous innate ability to heal. Medical interventions simply help this natural process. Diagnostic tests can give us a more accurate picture of a particular ailment. Antibiotics can give your natural immune system a helping hand. Surgery can correct a traumatic injury. But only the body itself can perform actual healing.
2. **Some sort of energy flows through the body to facilitate this healing.** Your body has an energy system, the same way it has a circulatory system, a musculoskeletal system, a nervous system, an endocrine system, and so on. The energy system of your body surrounds and interpenetrates your physical structures, and it is through this energy system that healing energy flows.
3. **The nature of this energy is to flow.** When the energy is flowing smoothly and plentifully, a state of physical and emotional health exists. When the smooth flow of this energy is interrupted—through either a depletion of the energy or a blockage in the system—the body becomes unbalanced, and the result is low energy. If this

energetic imbalance continues and the energy remains low for a period of time, this can lead to physical and emotional, or stress-related, ailments.

4. **This energy is quantifiable and measurable—if only by the way you feel.** And “how you feel” is a perfectly legitimate and accurate measurement of your health and energy. One of the most basic questions you can ask yourself regarding your health is this: do I have all the energy I want and need to live the life I want? If you answer no, then you can probably consider yourself as having low energy.
5. **Maintenance of this energetic equilibrium is essential for proper health, vitality, and energy.** In order to be healthy and to feel good—to have all the energy you want—your energy system must be in a state of homeostasis, which is, according to the dictionary, “a relatively stable state of equilibrium between the different but interdependent elements of an organism.” This simply means your energy must be in a constant state of dynamic flow: not too much or too little in any area and always moving at a steady pace throughout your body without interruption or impediment.
6. **This energy can be cultivated, controlled, and increased—with the right methods and proper training.** Perhaps this is the most important point of all. With some alternative healing modalities, this energy is increased by someone acting upon you—for example, an acupuncturist inserting needles into a certain part of the body to unblock or facilitate the flow of chi or a Reiki practitioner directing energy into the body. In others, such as yoga or *chi kung*, you learn techniques to increase the energy yourself.

We wrote this book to give you the right methods and proper training you will need to balance and build your energy. If you don’t believe you have all the energy you want or need to live the life you want—if you feel worn out, or just feel you look worn out—this book will help you.

* * *

Let’s now discuss the reasons people have low energy. If we exclude illness or pathology—diagnostically verifiable diseases or medical conditions

such as diabetes, cancer, and autoimmune disorders, many of which obviously can reduce your energy—there are, in my view, three main reasons people have chronically low energy: heredity, personal choices, and life situations and emotional reactions to them. I'll touch only briefly on the first two because they're fairly obvious, but I want to spend more time on the third, the emotional factor, because it is the most important and also the least understood.

The first factor that influences our flow and level of energy is heredity. It stands to reason that if we have an energy system the same way we have a circulatory system or a nervous system, some people will have a stronger or more effective energy system than others. Some people will simply be born with more energy, the way some people are born with a better physique or better eyesight. This doesn't mean, however, that low energy can't be overcome. You can be born with a heart murmur or even one kidney and still lead a normal or very full life. It's the same with your energy level. You just need to have access to the the right methods and proper training to increase your energy.

The second factor causing low energy is personal choice, and this is a factor that can be controlled. Is there anyone today who doesn't believe that smoking or excess drinking can negatively affect their health and energy? Proper diet, nutrition, and exercise are also vital to well-being, and any personal regimen designed to increase energy should take these elements into account. In fact, it should begin with them—even before seeking out an “energy routine.” If you eat poorly, get no exercise, and smoke a lot, don't expect this book to give you the secret to better health and more energy with no effort on your part. That's like being overweight, eating a high-fat, high-sodium diet, and expecting a physician to control your high blood pressure and high cholesterol with medication. It won't work.

I firmly believe that the third factor, our life situations and how we react to them emotionally, holds the key to understanding our entire energy system. In fact, I believe that most cases of stress-related health problems and low energy are attributable to how we process our emotions—and particularly our negative emotions. We all know the main stressors of modern life—career, relationships, children, financial pressures, and so on—and what they can do to us. A demanding job can drain your energy, leaving you with little for your family or yourself. A marriage or relationship and children can be a source of enormous comfort and joy, but they can also at times cause heartbreak, strain, and stress. Financial worries can

cause sleepless nights, anxiety, and worry. All of these situations—or more accurately, *how you react emotionally to these situations*—have the potential to cause a stress reaction in the body, which triggers chemical and energetic changes that can significantly reduce your level of energy. Let me explain how this works. First and foremost, we need to understand that stress reactions and negative emotions aren't “in your head,” as some physicians tell us; *they actually are in your body*. Here's how this happens. As mentioned earlier, you have not only a physical body but also an energy body. This energy body can be called your *aura*. An aura is composed of several interlocking energy fields, plus your energy centers, or *chakras*, and energy channels, or *meridians*. Together, these pieces make up your *energetic anatomy*, a term we will use frequently throughout the book. Your aura surrounds and interpenetrates your physical body, and it is in this aura that you hold all your emotions—positive and negative. The reason is simple: all emotions themselves are energy. Thus, whatever is in your energy field, or aura, whether it's good or bad, positive or negative, helpful or hurtful, is also in your physical body.

There are three general categories of harmful emotional energy that can cause physical problems: negative emotions, limiting beliefs, and traumatic memories. The most common negative emotions are anger and fear, and they're usually directed at ourselves, a person currently or formerly in our lives, or the general circumstances of our lives. (Of course, emotions such as anger and fear can play a constructive role in our health—there's nothing wrong with being fearful in a potentially dangerous situation, and many psychologists would say that becoming angry in reaction to an instance of injustice would be normal and healthy. But in general, negative emotions have a harmful effect on our energy supply and health.) Limiting beliefs are attitudes that we adopt during our formative years as a result of the behavior of an authority figure or our experience in the world. Limiting beliefs are almost always false, yet we act and live our lives as if they were true. For example, you may have always felt that you just weren't attractive enough or smart enough—despite evidence to the contrary. A traumatic memory is an unshakable or repeating image or recollection of a disturbing incident—for example, witnessing a terrible accident as a child or the death of a loved one.

In the energy body, these harmful emotional energies create “ripples” that become impediments to the smooth and balanced flow of prana throughout your aura. Think of these blockages as a kink in a garden hose. The area above the kink is congested; water pressure builds up. The area

below the kink is depleted; water pressure decreases. It works the same way with your energy body. Negative emotions, limiting beliefs, and traumatic memories create little “dams” that interrupt the smooth flow of prana. Thus, some areas of your aura become congested, and others become depleted, but the result is that the entire energy body becomes unbalanced. And as a result, health problems can arise in the parts of your physical body where you are holding these harmful emotional energies.

Here’s a very important point to understand about destructive emotional energies in the body: there is *always* a physical feeling underlying any negative emotion, limiting belief, or traumatic memory. Consider, for example, the emotion of sadness. Think about the last time you were sad to the point of actually being depressed. Notice that it wasn’t just a thought, but a *feeling in your body*. People don’t say, “I think sad.” They say, “I *feel* sad.” The muscles feel limp, the body feels heavy, and the posture often reflects the sadness and depression: shoulders slumped, head down, eyes averted. Think about the last time you were anxious or fearful. More than likely, you felt it somewhere in your body. Perhaps it was your gastrointestinal system. If so, you may have thought to yourself, “Wow, my stomach is really in a knot,” and that was quite likely physiologically true. Your stomach and/or intestines probably were tightly contracted in a spasm. It’s also possible that your anxiety or fear contributed to constipation or diarrhea.

It works similarly with limiting beliefs. Perhaps your parents or a teacher told you repeatedly that you’d never amount to anything, and, as a result, you grew up with a lack of confidence and a poor self-image. This sort of conditioning could manifest as any number of unproductive attitudes and behaviors in adulthood, but one might be the belief that you’re not smart enough to make good decisions. So you become indecisive or overly cautious because you’re terrified of making a mistake or the wrong decision. And physically, each time you have to make a choice of some consequence, your neck muscles tense or your jaw clenches or your chest gets tight and it’s difficult to breathe. And that’s just one example of the physical feelings limiting beliefs might produce.

In my experience as a physician, traumatic memories are almost *always* held tightly somewhere in the physical body. Whenever patients tell me about a traumatic memory from their past, the first question I ask is, “When you think about that event, where do you feel it in your body?” About 80 percent of the time or more, patients are able to tell me exactly where they feel the emotional memory—as pain or discomfort—in their bodies.

It's important to note that, when dealing with all these harmful negative energies stuck in the body, quite often the physical feelings they generate are triggered so quickly and automatically that many people don't make a cause-and-effect connection between a feeling of depression or a traumatic memory and fatigue or physical discomfort unless it is brought to their attention in therapy or through some cognitive self-awareness technique. The indecisive adult in the limiting belief example mentioned earlier may not be aware of why or how his jaw gets so tense when he has to make a decision. Or, as is the case with the roughly 20 percent of women who say they were sexually abused but are unable to locate an emotional pain in their bodies, it's not that the memory is *not* held in their bodies, it's just that the women are so dissociated from their bodies, or they have buried the incident so completely, that they can't identify the feeling, let alone the location of the feeling.

In all these cases, the physical feelings are there; it's just that many times, we aren't sufficiently tuned into our bodies to feel them. And for good reason: when we're young we're taught to hold in our thoughts and feelings about difficult or painful experiences; we're told that it's not okay to feel or express emotions such as anger or anxiety. In fact, we're not even supposed to talk about them, especially if they're negative or uncomfortable—for us or for others. The problem with this is obvious: life is going to provoke anger or anxiety responses; it's inevitable. Suppressing these feelings—either because of conditioning or the quite natural fear of the pain and discomfort that would arise should we acknowledge them consciously—takes a tremendous amount of our energy and attention. Even if we're not always aware of our efforts, many of us work very hard to prevent ourselves from feeling our emotions. It's exhausting work, and this ongoing effort to bottle them up and keep them from conscious awareness is a prime source of not only general fatigue but also physical maladies.

For instance, it's fairly common to store negative feelings as unconscious contractions of the smooth muscles or skeletal muscles. The smooth muscles are those muscles functioning automatically in our body, without our conscious control, such as the musculature of the stomach, the bladder, the blood vessels, and the air passages. Holding unresolved emotions in the smooth muscles for a prolonged period can produce health problems such as irritable bowel syndrome, migraine headaches, high blood pressure, and asthma. The skeletal muscles are those muscles that we do have conscious control over, such as those involved with our arms and legs, the joints of movement, our facial expressions, and so on.

If you hold a suppressed traumatic memory in the skeletal muscles, it may present itself as chronic pain in your neck, shoulders, or back. Or you may be plagued by frequent tension headaches, temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorder, or fibromyalgia.

These sorts of common maladies are marked by two characteristics: first, their cause is undetectable through modern medical scientific testing; and second, the symptoms are real enough—and often debilitating. Thus, because the functioning of the body is impaired in some unknown way, physicians call such conditions “functional ailments,” and they account for a significant number of visits to the physician. Doctors may attribute the cause to stress, and they will usually only treat the physical symptoms—almost always with medication (inhalers for asthma, antispasmodics for irritable bowel syndrome, muscle relaxers for tight muscles, and so on). This is because they *can’t* treat the cause—since the cause is energetic and emotional, not physiological. My hope is that some day, through the growing understanding of our life force and energy medicine, physicians will be able to write on a patient’s chart a diagnosis of “energetic blockage due to unresolved emotional trauma” and prescribe an appropriate energetic or emotional treatment.

ERIC B. ROBINS, MD

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Here’s a brief guide on how this book is organized so that you may get the most from it. It would certainly be best for your intellectual understanding of the body’s energy system and how it works if you read the book in proper chapter-by-chapter sequence, but if you want a quick read and wish to get right to the exercises, you can go directly to chapter 6, “Performing the Nine Energizing Breaths.” The exercises will still work for you and produce the energy you want even if you don’t have a full understanding of your energetic anatomy, though we would still caution you to follow carefully all the directions and admonitions in that chapter.

If you read the book chapter by chapter, you’ll find the philosophical and practical underpinnings of the Nine Energizing Breaths in Parts One and Two, followed by the exercise routine itself in Part Three, a variety of complementary meditations and supplemental energy exercises in Part Four, and finally, some appendices for those interested in additional material.

Part One is entitled “A Spiritual and Energetic Framework for the Contemporary World,” and it details how Grandmaster Choa Kok Sui developed and introduced to the world Pranic Healing, his exhaustively

detailed energy healing system, and Arhatic Yoga, his synthesis of various yoga and spiritual traditions. This discussion provides perspective and context for the Nine Energizing Breaths, as it also shows how these exercises fit into the larger background of his teachings.

Part Two, entitled “Building Your Energetic Foundation,” begins with chapter 2, and here we go into more depth about prana, the universal life force that our body uses to power all its tasks, and our energetic anatomy, or our personal energy field, also known as the aura. Part Two also contains a summary of the key elements that characterize truly effective energy-generating practices and how the Nine Energizing Breaths utilize these elements for optimal personal energy production and health.

Proper pranic breathing is covered in chapter 3. Pranic breathing is controlled abdominal breathing performed with the right rhythm (so many beats per inhalation and exhalation) and retention (a critical pause between inhalation and exhalation). The Nine Energizing Breaths are powered by correct pranic breathing, in addition to body postures and “locks,” which are muscular contractions in a certain part of the body that build up and/or direct the prana in a specific way, so attention to performing the breath with accuracy can’t be emphasized enough.

Chapter 4 addresses Energetic Hygiene, which is a bonus from Grandmaster Choa’s more advanced teachings. Energetic Hygiene is a set of rules and practices that keep your personal energy tank clean and full. It is a large topic, and there are many Energetic Hygiene techniques. However, we provide in this book three of the simplest and most effective methods for the care and maintenance of your energetic system: dietary recommendations, cutting the “energetic cords” that often drain your energy, and saltwater baths. These techniques are remarkably effective for increasing your stamina, and they are an excellent complement to the Nine Energizing Breaths.

Chapter 5 contains instruction in the Cleansing Physical Exercises referenced earlier. This set of mild twists and stretches is easy to perform, requiring little strength and flexibility, yet its ability to boost your energy by helping you expel dirty prana is amazing. The exercises make a good warm-up for the Nine Energizing Breaths.

Part Three, “The Nine Energizing Breaths,” is the centerpiece of the book, and it takes you step-by-step through the routine as it should be practiced daily. It also includes a discussion of these energy-generating exercises in general, as well as the history of the Nine Energizing Breaths and why they increase your energy and support longevity and youthfulness.

Part Four, entitled “Advanced Practices for Enhanced Purification and Sustained Energy,” includes several chapters with routines that you can add as a complement to the Nine Energizing Breaths. If you can make time for them in your daily practice, they will definitely accelerate your personal energy development. They include three simple but powerful meditations and feature Meditation on Twin Hearts, the foundational meditation of Grandmaster Choa’s teachings. The supplemental energy exercises include the Tiger Breath and Five Points Energy Distribution, both of which will give you an extra boost, plus add some variety to your practice. This part concludes with some advice on helping you construct a daily practice regimen.

At the end of the book, there are three appendices, the first of which, appendix A, explains a topic from Pranic Healing called the Seven Healing Factors. These are rules that help determine how effective any healing effort—traditional, alternative, or energetic—will be. However, since practicing exercises that boost your own vitality and energy is nothing if not *self-healing*, reading about the Seven Healing Factors should enhance your understanding and practice of the Nine Energizing Breaths. Appendix B includes a brief summary of the major principles of three of the most popular energy practices: yoga, chi kung, and *tai chi chuan*. These three modalities are referenced frequently in the book because the Nine Energizing Breaths share many characteristics with them. In fact, the Nine Energizing Breaths may be said to be a distillation of the best of these practices. Finally, appendix C is a resource section in which we list and describe the various Pranic Healing and Arhatic Yoga classes offered throughout the world.

We will frequently discuss topics from both the physiological and the energetic perspective. That is, we will talk about a particular situation or exercise in terms of how it affects not only your physical anatomy (that is, the musculoskeletal and biochemical impact) but also your energetic anatomy. It’s important that you understand the “energetic truth” behind many of the things you do and how your actions positively and negatively affect your overall level of energy.

It is our fondest wish that you use the power of prana to supercharge your energy, revitalize your health, and rejuvenate your body. Whether you feel like your “tank” is always drained, or you find yourself dragging yourself from home to work and back again each day, or you’re just always too tired to get involved with activities you’d like to do, this book has an answer for you. The Nine Energizing Breaths and the related exercises can open the door for you to a healthier, more energized body and an invigorated life.