

Zone Exercises for Balancing Stress and Building Vitality

Paul Chek

Dealing with stress is becoming an everyday part of modern living, with its information overload, long commutes and deadlines, let alone finding time for family and yourself. It's no wonder most people cringe at the thought of trying to squeeze exercise into their busy schedules. Yet there are simple movements that you can do that actually increase your energy and vitality take only minutes a day and don't require a trip to the gym.

Building energy and vitality in your body is a lot like investing. Just as it takes money to make money, *it takes energy to make energy*. Your body is a co-dependent, linked system of systems; your circulatory, digestive, hormonal and musculoskeletal systems are all examples. One system cannot function in isolation and all are energy dependent. Yet just like the heating and air conditioning system in your house, they not only use energy, *they produce it*. When you eat quality food, you *spend* energy to chew and digest it. Metabolized food molecules provide both chemical and electrical charges that help the body perform work, such as building hormones.

Expending energy to inhale brings air into your body. Your lungs take oxygen from the air you breathe and attach it to iron particles in your red blood cells to be delivered to all parts of your body by the circulatory system. The oxygen in the air you breathe carries a very strong positive charge, acting like the positive pole of a magnet, while your body tissues and the water in your body (about 75% of your body is water) act like the negative pole of a magnet. As you may remember from science class, wherever you find a positive and negative pole, there's *energy* and *work potential*. Breathing oxygen into the body creates energy or work potential. This energy is called *Prana* by East Indian Yogis and mystics, or *Chi* or *Qi* by masters of Tai Chi, Qigong and the many martial arts.

Much of the energy produced by breathing and eating is used to run your muscles so you can move, have fun and produce more energy. Most people only associate muscle work with *fatigue* or *loss of energy*, but this results from excessive use of the muscles and body systems that support activity—particularly when there is an imbalance between the amount of work or exercise relative to the amount of rest time. Muscles help energize the body by producing electromagnetic energy and by acting as pumps to assist the action of the circulatory and digestive systems. By exercising the muscles in different parts of the body, we can deliver *beneficial energy* to the hormonal and organ systems, as well as to tissues related to the spinal segments in that particular area. There are seven different areas of the body, called Zones (Table 1). Those familiar with the concept of chakras will see that each Zone corresponds to a different chakra (Figure 1). This system is the foundation for yoga, Tai Chi, Qigong and the Zone Exercises that follow.

Table 1: Zones, Muscles, Related Functions and Issues

Zone	Muscles	Related Functions	Related Issues
Zone 1	Pelvis, legs and feet	Adrenals and fight/flight response; Bones and skeletal structure	Financial stress
Zone 2	Lower abdominals, lumbar region, legs and feet	Sexual functions; Elimination; Water regulation	Stress over relationships and sex
Zone 3	Upper abdominals and middle back	Digestion; Assimilation; Musculoskeletal system	Personal power and self will; Digestive issues
Zone 4	>Upper back and chest	Electromagnetic field generator; Blood pressure; Immune system	Stress over relationships and love
Zone 5	Lower neck, shoulder, arm and hand	Metabolism; Calcium regulation	Communication
Zone 6	Upper neck, face and head	Sleep/wake cycles; Hormonal and physiological regulation	Mental congestion, lack of mental clarity or creativity

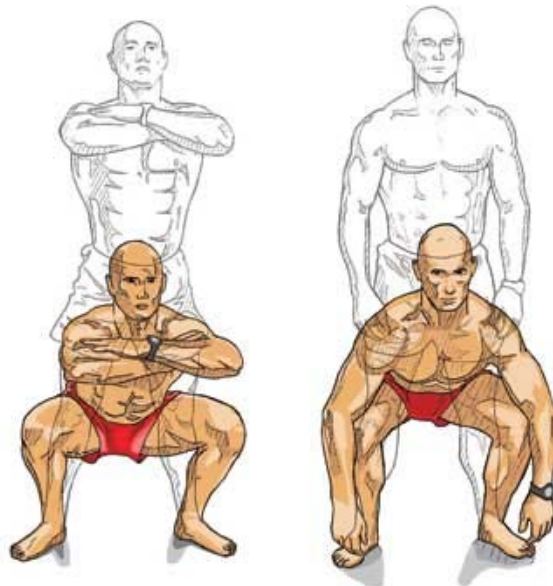
How to Perform Zone Exercises

1. Look at Table 1 and determine which areas are key issues for you and which Zone these correspond to. You may have musculoskeletal problems, such as pain, repeated injury or weakness in a particular area. Issues within one or more systems of your body may be a priority to you, such as high blood pressure, poor digestion, difficulty sleeping, or hormonal fluctuations around menopause or menstruation. Alternatively, you may strongly identify with factors in the Related Issues column, such as feeling that financial stress is a major pressure in your life at present. Prioritize your top three or four issues, whether within your body or seemingly from an external source; many people find that these fall into just one or two Zones.
2. There are several exercises demonstrated for each of the six zones. Try each of the exercises and choose the one that you feel is most effective. If you have more time you can do more than one Zone Exercise because they don't cause fatigue—they *energize*.
3. Zone Exercises can be done any time. If you feel tired or sluggish, perform a Zone Exercise and your energy levels will likely increase. Performed before or after eating, Zone Exercises can improve digestion. This is a good time to determine how much effort to use with Zone Exercises. If you are working too hard, your digestion will feel compromised. If you are exercising at the correct level for a Zone Exercise, your digestion will feel improved.
4. When performing Zone Exercises, always remember that *the faster you move your body, the slower Chi energy moves and the slower you move your body, the faster Chi energy moves*. If you experiment with your Zone Exercises, you will soon experience this interesting phenomenon.
5. For anyone trying to cut down on sugar, caffeine or any other addictive substance, you may find Zone Exercises provide energy to compensate for the *fake*, or *empty* energy often provided by addictive substances.
6. Zone Exercises can help you unwind. By performing Zone Exercises, you bring more Chi into your body. If you have a hard time falling asleep or sleeping through the night, practice your Zone Exercises just before going to bed. Chi is intelligent—it knows when to speed up specific cells and body systems and when to slow them down!

Zone 1

Breathing Squats

- Take a comfortable stance, wide enough to squat down between your legs. Place your arms at your sides or in front.
- Inhale through your nose, then lower yourself down as you exhale through your nose. If you need to exhale through your mouth, keep a little tension in your lips. Go as low as comfortable, pause, then inhale and return to standing.
- Repeat at the pace you naturally breathe, up to 100 times.



Superman

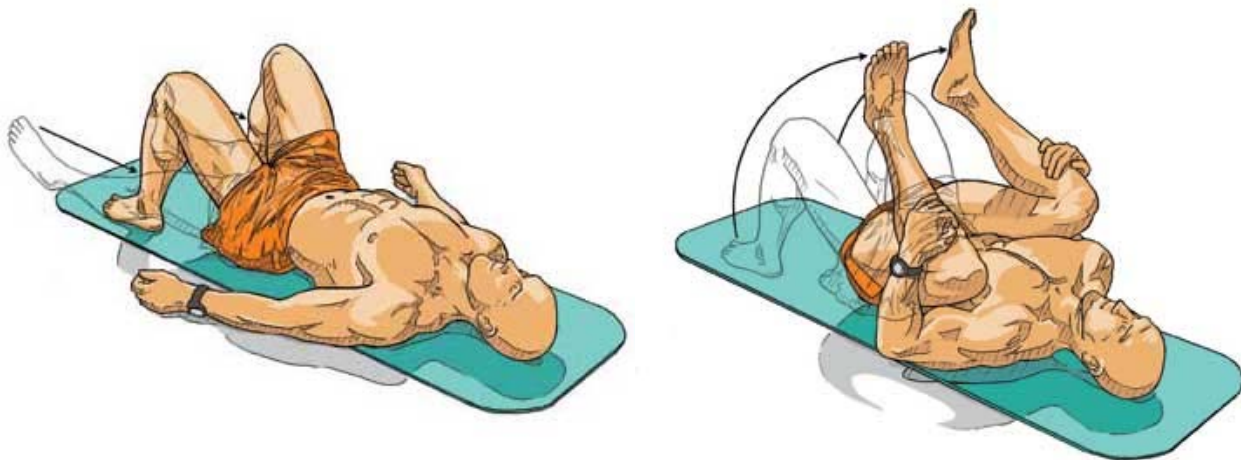
- Start face down on the floor, or over a Swiss ball.
- Lift left arm and right leg so that they are at about the same height. Your arm should be 45-degrees from your head with thumb pointed up.
- Hold this position for as long as you can with good form (up to 10 seconds) and switch sides. Do five each side.



Zone 2

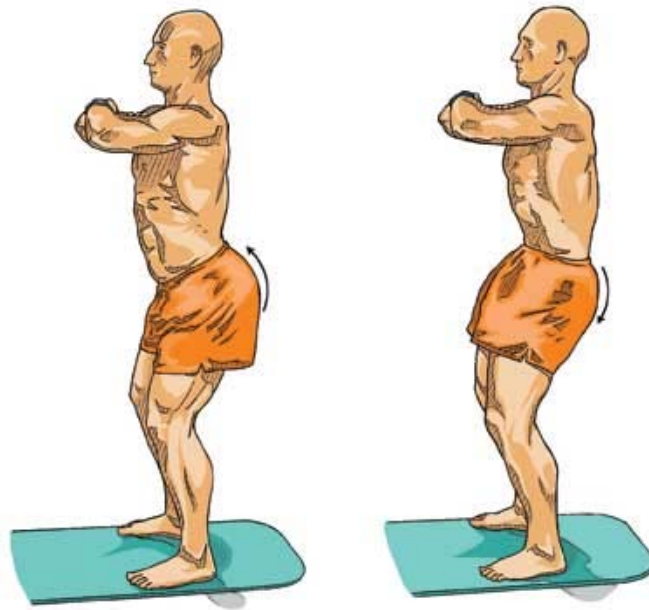
Leg Tuck

- Lie on your back with your knees bent.
- Inhale, then draw legs into chest as you exhale (you may open the legs to pull them in closer).
- Inhale again as you return legs to the floor. Repeat ten times slowly.



Front-to-Back Pelvic Rock

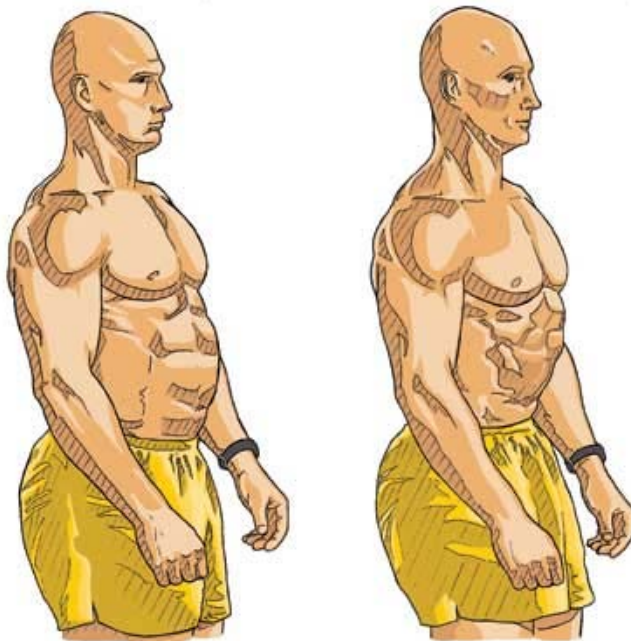
- Stand with soft knees, or sit upright on a Swiss ball.
- Inhale, imagining that you have headlights on your butt and shine them up to the ceiling.
- Keep your trunk still as you move your pelvis.
- Exhale and roll your pelvis back underneath you, so the headlights shine down. Repeat ten times.



Zone 3

Piston Breathing

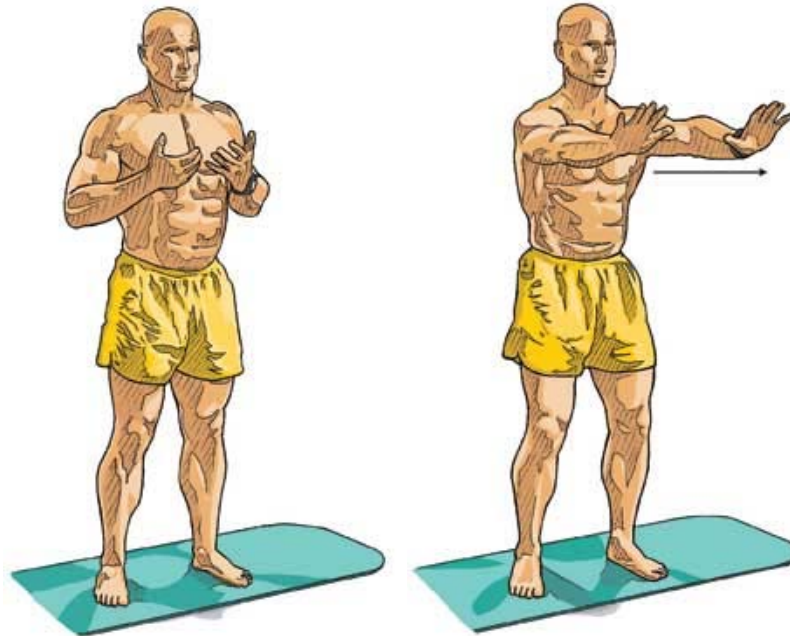
- Stand in a relaxed posture, inhale deeply, allowing your belly to expand.
- Exhale forcefully through your nose. (If you cannot breathe through your nose, exhale through your mouth while pursing your lips like a trumpet player).
- Inhale again slowly and repeat up to 100 exhalation pulses.



Energy Push

- Stand with arms raised straight out in front of you.
- Inhale and bring hands back in towards your body.
- Exhale and push your arms straight out with the intent of projecting energy from your core out of your arms and hands.
- Repeat, pushing to the center, front left, front right and back left and back right.

- As you push to the sides and back, keep your feet planted and turn your body towards the direction you are pushing.
- For the back position, only go as far as you comfortably can. Do not over-rotate your spine.
- Do up to 20 pushes in each direction.



Zone 4

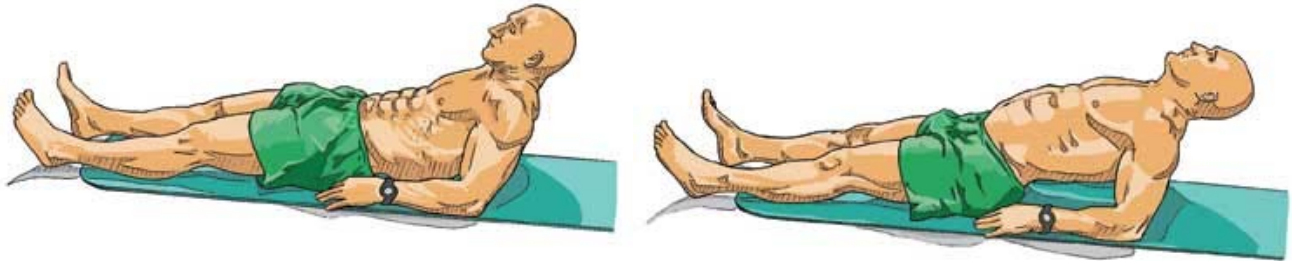
Prone Cobra

- Lie face down with your arms at your sides.
- As you inhale, pick your chest off the floor while simultaneously squeezing shoulder blades together and rotating arms out so that palms face away from body with thumbs pointing up to the ceiling.
- Keep your head and neck in neutral alignment, and toes on the floor.
- You should feel the muscles between your shoulder blades doing the work. If you feel stress in your low back, squeeze your butt cheeks together prior to lifting your body.
- Hold until you need to breathe out, and exhale as you lower your torso to the floor. Repeat 10-20 times.



The Fish

- Lie back, resting on your arms. Inhale, pick your chest up as high as you can. Hold for 10 seconds then relax and repeat 10 times.
- If this is uncomfortable for you, stand with good posture, inhale and open your arms wide as if flying like a bird with your palms up. Exhale and bring arms back across your body.



Zone 5

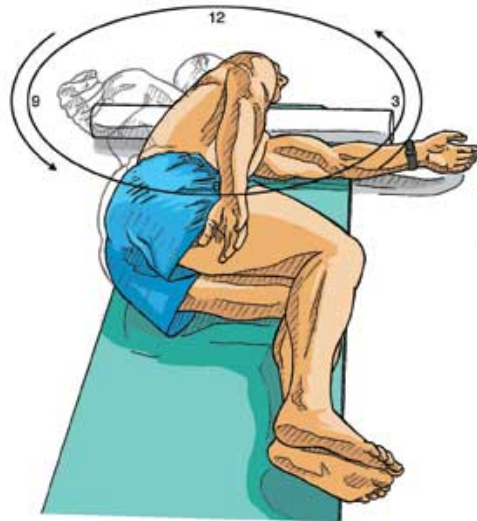
Thoracic Mobilization

- Hold arms straight out to the side and stay relaxed.
- Inhale, turn your right arm up and left arm down and look down the left arm.
- When you naturally want to exhale, turn your head to the other side and reverse arm positions. Repeat 10 times each side.



Shoulder Clocks

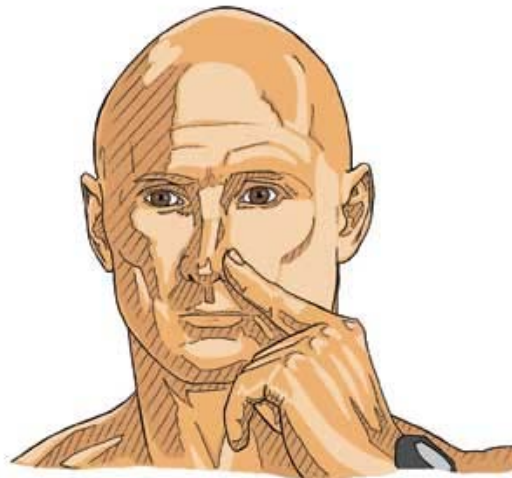
- Stand or lie on your side with your knees bent.
- Visualize that your shoulder is in the middle of a clock. Elevate shoulder toward ear (12 o'clock), then roll shoulder either forward (1, 2, 3 o'clock) or backward (11, 10, 9 o'clock) around the clock. Inhale as you move through the back half of the clock (7 - 12 o'clock) and exhale as you move through the front half of the clock (1 through 6 o'clock).
- Keep your head looking forward and arm relaxed. Do 10 circles in each direction and repeat on the other arm.



Zone 6

Alternate Nostril Breathing

- Plug one nostril with a finger or your thumb.
- Breathe in through your open nostril—your chest should rise in the last third of your breath only. Breathe out through your nostril, keeping the other one plugged.
- Try to breathe in and out for the same amount of time; i.e. five seconds in and five seconds out.
- Alternate nostrils with each complete breath or with each inhalation. Repeat 10 times each side.



Cross Crawl

- Raise your arms up. Pick up your left leg and bring your right elbow to the left knee as you exhale.
- Alternate sides 10-20 times.



More Zone exercises and applications can be found in my book [How to Eat, Move and Be Healthy!](#) available from the C.H.E.K Institute.

About the Author

Internationally acclaimed speaker, consultant and Holistic Health Practitioner Paul Chek, draws upon over twenty-two years of experience in corrective exercise, high performance conditioning and integrative lifestyle management. Author of over 60 DVDs and 6 books, plus numerous correspondence courses and seminars, he has also created four certification programs for advanced professional development. Paul is the founder of the C.H.E.K Institute (www.chekinstitute.com) and the creator of the P~P~S Success Mastery Program (www.ppsuccess.com).

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