

# Benefits of the Chi Exerciser: Practitioner Trials

by Hannah McDonald



## Background

Chi Exercisers originated in Japan 15 years ago – where they emerged from the understanding within Shiatsu and elsewhere about the value of swinging the feet to create a harmonic response through the torso. The rhythmic rocking movement generated acts to both release tension in the back and shoulders, and to stimulate respiration and the nervous system, giving a distinct boost of Chi energy – while the user lies down and focuses on letting go to the motion and completely relaxing.

The Japanese realized that benefits occur at many levels. The concept was recognized as a remedial medical device by the Ministry of Health & Welfare in 1990, and with their health-conscious and busy lifestyles, the Japanese quickly became enthusiasts. This newly found way of exercising became known in Japan as *Kingyo Undo* – or ‘goldfish exercise’ – and its popularity then spread to the Chinese, who realised the strong connection with ‘Chi’ energy.

The Surge of Chi Exerciser was launched in Britain in late 2002, based on a tried and tested model that had become the top selling model in the US, with electronic programming that allows the user to adjust running speed during use.

The ability to control speed not only allows each user to find a speed that resonates with their own body, but opens up use to a much broader spectrum of user – including many with health conditions that would prevent them using the high fixed speeds of the first generation of products, yet who benefit greatly from receiving the stimulating and relaxing exercise provided by regular use.

Energy for Health introduced a new version of the Surge of Chi Exerciser in 2004, which offers several more refinements. Its hand controller has a display showing the exact running speed and the time elapsed during use, with pre-programmed auto sessions also featured. The objective is to put the user firmly in control, yet to give them all the tools needed to allow the machine to do the work – so they can focus on relaxing and letting the body’s natural response take place without resistance.

## Introduction

In 2005, Energy for Health undertook a series of trials with 145 Health Professionals and Yoga teachers.

The aims of the trial were as follows:

1. To gather information on the uses and benefits of the variable speed functionality and the Auto Programmes provided on the Surge of Chi Mark 2.

2. To gather information from qualified professionals on the physical, mental and emotional benefits identified by them from regular use of the Surge of Chi Exerciser.
3. To gauge levels of recommendations from qualified therapists and to build a picture of possible future product developments and research requirements.
4. To get feedback on any possible negative aspects.

The group of participants included a good cross-section covering many practitioner types (see Figure 1).

Participants were asked to complete a 30-day diary style log as well as specific feedback on experience, perceived benefits, speed settings and Auto Programmes, general comments and recommendations.

At the time of writing, 100 logs had been received, reflecting a return rate of 69%. The trial logs of the remaining participants were still outstanding at the time of writing, though many of these have decided to purchase the unit as a result of their positive experience with it.

## Speed

An important aspect of the trial was to assess the benefits of having a fully variable speed instead of a single fixed speed, as was the case with the first generation Chi Exercisers that originated in Japan 15 years ago, or a limited number of fixed speed settings.

Most people recorded their speeds accurately on their daily log, with top speeds varying from 100 to 150 rpm. The average top speed (calculated on the basis of including the top speeds used on the auto programmes which range up to 140 rpm) works out to 135 rpm, with many people expressing preference for a lower speed, even if they had taken the exerciser up to the top speed of 160 rpm.

Fifty (50%) of the participants commented directly on the benefits of having variable speed. The overall perception was that having the choice to vary the speed during a session, enables individuals to tailor each session to their own needs. Those who allowed friends, family or

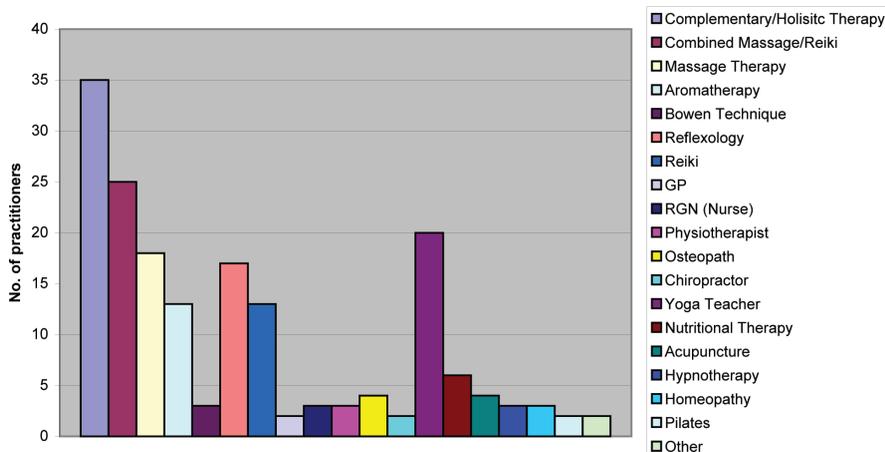


Figure 1. Types of Therapy Practised

The 3 Auto-Modes are each timed to last 15 minutes. The speed varies gradually at preset timings over 15 minutes (as shown in the graph). The current speed shows on the display at all times.

Auto 1 is Leisure Time Mode, Auto 2 is Oxygen Mode & Auto 3 is Sleep Mode - especially good for helping to relax before sleep.

The Display shows Auto 1, Auto 2 or Auto 3 at the bottom of the screen.

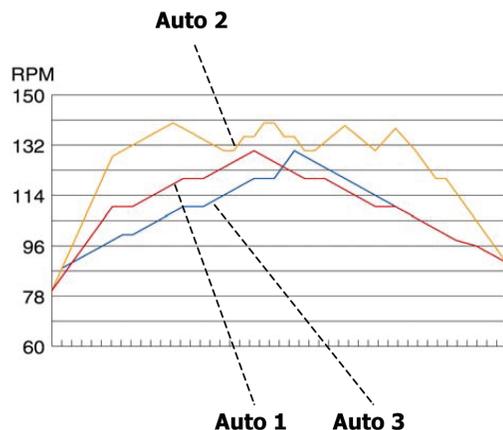


Figure 2. Auto Modes

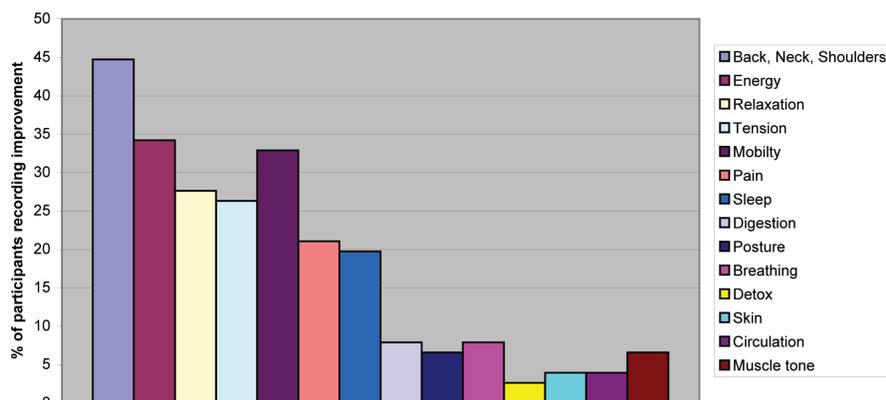


Figure 3. Areas of Physical Improvement

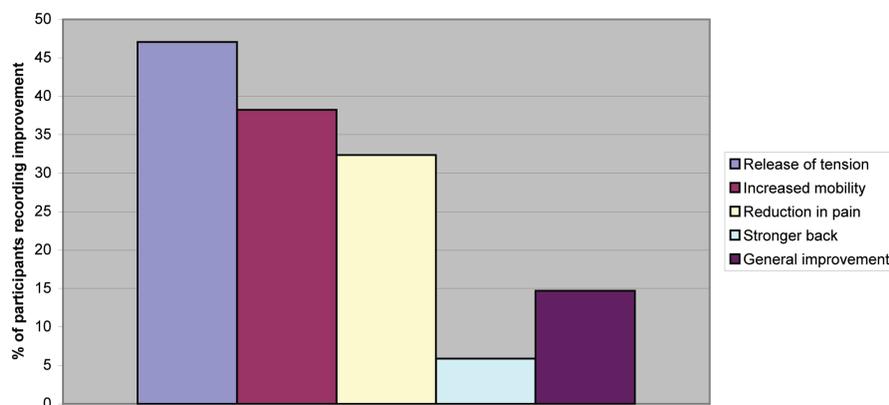


Figure 4. Improvement in Back, Neck, Shoulders and Hips

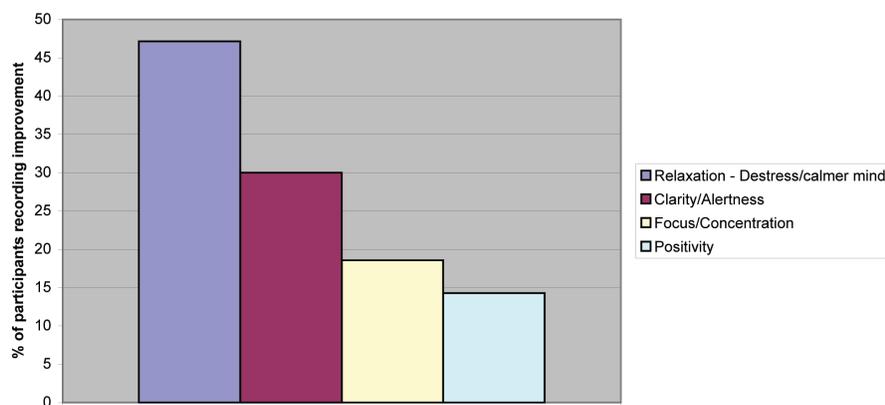


Figure 5. Areas of Mental Improvement

clients to use the Chi Exerciser all felt that having a variable speed enabled them to tailor the session to the individual's needs, and that this was beneficial to the user.

### Auto Programmes

See Figure 2.

#### Auto 1

The general consensus of those who tried this programme was that it was very relaxing and enjoyable. Most felt it was a good programme to relax and switch off at the end of the day; very good for de-stressing but also energizing.

#### Auto 2

Of those that expressed a preference for any of the Auto Programmes, most seemed to prefer Auto 2. The general effect was felt to be energizing and invigorating, a good programme if you need more energy.

#### Auto 3

The overall opinion of those who tried this programme was that it was good for releasing tension, calming and enhancing relaxation. An often expressed opinion was that this programme either helped with getting to sleep or improved the quality of sleep.

### Feedback on Initial Use (1st week of use)

Seventy-five participants reported on the effects felt in the first three days of use, and 60 on effects after the first week of use. Of those reporting, 54 (72%) found that they felt more relaxed almost immediately in the first three sessions, with 19 (25%) reporting some mild to moderate initial side-effects.

The initial problems experienced by some participants included headaches (six participants), stiffness or aching in back or neck (six participants), and nausea or dizziness (six participants). Other participants described feeling a bit 'spaced out' or slightly reduced energy initially. Any initial negative effects generally eased off with continued gentle use, usually in the first week, although one participant decided to discontinue using the exerciser as a result of bad migraines, which were triggered in the first three days.

Thirty-one (41%) of the participants reporting on the initial use recorded that they felt a tingling or other palpable sensation (waves of energy or energy flowing) after a session in the first three days. Some participants only felt an after-effect from the movement after a few sessions.

### Physical Benefits

Seventy-six (76%) of the participants who completed the questionnaire commented on the physical benefits they experienced as a result of using the Surge of Chi Exerciser for 30 days. The main areas of improvement, commented on by those who completed this portion of the questionnaire, are covered (Figure 3). There is a later section of this report dedicated to very specific conditions and symptoms that were helped. Most of those who commented on the physical benefits saw improvement in more than one area. All figures given relate to the 76 participants who reported on this area.

The areas that seemed to improve most consistently were the back, neck, shoulders and hips, with 34 (45%) of the participants experiencing some level of improvement. As shown in Figure 4, 16 (47%) of these experienced a reduction in tension either in the back, neck or shoulders, while 13 (38%) noted an increase in mobility or a freeing of the joints. Eleven (32%) of these participants recorded a direct reduction in pain either in the back, neck and shoulders or, in one case, in the hip area which has been an on-going problem. Of those recording an improvement in this area five (15%) felt that there had been an overall improvement in back health whilst two (six per cent) recorded feeling their back or sacrum stronger.

Another common area of improvement was in energy levels with 26 (34%) experiencing an increase in levels. The increase in energy was mostly commented on as an additional benefit to improvement in another area, such as less tension or better sleep, although some participants found this to be the main benefit.

Twenty-one (28%) of the participants who commented on physical benefits found using the exerciser improved their relaxation. This relaxation helped 15 (20%) of the participants with sleep patterns, as well as increasing the general wellbeing of

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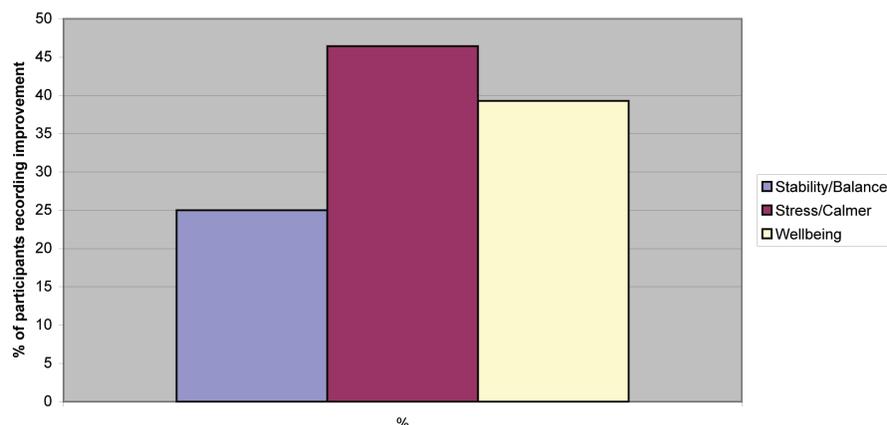


Figure 6. Areas of Emotional Improvement

many participants and helping them deal better with stress as noted in mental and emotional benefits. (See Figures 5 and 6).

A further 20 (26%) recorded a decrease in tension, and another 25 (33%) experienced an increase in mobility and/or flexibility of their joints and body in general.

Digestion was improved in six (8%) of the participants and a further six (8%) participants noted an improvement in their breathing.

Finally three (5%) of the participants noted improvements in skin health and another three (5%) in circulation, whilst five (7%) recorded that their muscle tone had improved, especially around the abdomen and pelvis.

### Mental Benefits

Seventy (70%) of the participants who filled in the questionnaire commented on mental benefits. Included in this section were comments on non-specific areas such as 'inner guilt of not exercising gone' and 'helped awareness of different parts of the body'. There were, however, four recurrent themes for a significant number of these 70 participants (see Figure 5). All Figures given relate to the 70 participants who reported on this area.

Thirty-three (47%) of those recording a benefit said that the relaxation from using the exerciser enabled them to feel less mentally stressed and/or that it produced a calmer mind. This was mostly recorded as a benefit of using the exerciser at the end of a working day or just before bed.

Twenty-one (30%) of the participants reported having improved clarity of thought and/or mental alertness. This was recorded as a benefit when using the exerciser first thing in the morning (helping them to wake up), and also as a long-term benefit of general use.

Thirteen (19%) of the participants found that using the exerciser on a daily basis helped to improve their focus and/or concentration. At least two participants saw this as helping them to become more decisive in their lives.

Ten (14%) of the participants commented on having a more positive mental outlook.

### Emotional Benefits

Fifty-six (56%) of the participants who filled in the questionnaire commented on the emotional benefits. Whilst many of these recorded the benefit of relaxation under this heading, as well as under physical and/or mental benefits, the other recorded benefits of this section were broken down into three main areas of improvement (see Figure 6). All figures given below relate to the 56 participants who reported on this area.

Fourteen (25%) of the participants noted greater stability and balance in their emotions over the course of the trial. Some participants found that emotional stability was improved by having the time to reflect on things during a session, whilst others felt that the accumulative effect of using the exerciser helped them to feel more balanced in general.

Twenty-six (46%) felt less stressed and calmer. This included participants who commented on a reduction in anxiety levels either in specific situations or in general, and on a reduction in stress, resulting in either a release of held emotions or feeling less affected by things going on around them.

Twenty-two (39%) of those who commented noticed an improved sense of wellbeing. Some commented on a general sense of feeling nurtured or having a feel-good factor after a session, whilst others

referred to a general improvement in wellbeing over the course of the 30 days.

### Charts

Twenty-two participants returned the charts supplied, recording a variety of symptom improvements. Whilst each individual chart reflected measurements of symptoms important to them, most reported on four main areas, i.e. energy (19), sleep (15), tension (15), posture (10).

Of the 19 energy charts, 16 showed definite improvement while two showed no real change and one did not complete the 30 days and indicated a lower energy level at the end of their trial period. Eleven of the 16 improved charts showed significant overall increases (over 20%) in energy. Some of the charts showed an initial decrease in energy or a drop in energy in the first two weeks, but an overall increase in energy levels then emerged with regular use.

Of the 15 charts recording sleep patterns 12, showed an overall improvement while two showed no improvement (already had good sleep patterns). One did not complete the 30 days and indicated generally fluctuating sleep patterns. Six of the 12 improved charts showed significant (over 20%) improvement in sleep patterns and one participant in particular went from 20% good sleep (suffering from insomnia) to 100%.

Of the 15 charts recording tension, 14 showed an overall improvement in tension levels either generally or in a specific area (e.g. upper body or neck); the remaining participant recorded a drop in tension levels despite not completing the 30 days. Nine of the 15 recorded a significant (over 20%) reduction in tension.

Of the ten charts recording posture, all ten indicated an improvement. Five of the ten recorded a significant (over 20%) improvement in posture, and these charts also recorded improved levels of tension and energy.

There were other benefits recorded on some charts and these are shown in Table 1.

### Specific Symptoms and Conditions

Some participants who took part in the trial commented on improvements experienced in relation to specific pre-existing symptoms and/or medium to long-term conditions, in themselves and/or others. These conditions are listed in Table 2 with a brief statement on the

Area of Improvement	No of participants	% Improvement (ave)
Mood/Wellbeing	4	25
Low Back Pain	3	22
Mental Clarity	2	20
Back Mobility	1	25
Immune System	1	15
Pain	2	32
Breathing/Relaxation	1	35
Serenity	1	25
Irritability	1	35
Skin	2	35

Table 1. Benefits Recorded in Some Charts

Arthritis	1 session a day has (shown) gain from it, movement better
Asthma	My breathing is excellent
Brachial Neuritis	Has improved
Insomnia (1)	Sleep is definitely better. Deeper and longer, less dreaming.
Insomnia (2)	Unusual for me to sleep well. Sleeping better.
Long term Back/Neck Ache	Back the best it's been for a long time. Reduces tension, relaxes muscles, reduces aches
Lower back and Left Hip problem	Pain relief and more flexibility
Menstrual cramps/pains	Eased on first day and less severe. No cramps/pains on second day when normally would have
ME/CFS	More energy, huge reduction in muscle pain, refreshing sleep, improved mental clarity
Multiple Sclerosis	Used it at a higher speed ...and liked the more vigorous movement and felt it helps with feelings of lethargy and tiredness
Sciatica (after gardening)	I worked all day in the garden ...had none that day or the day after
Unstable right sacro-iliac joint (causing subluxations of spine)	Really helped to relax and strengthen my sacro-iliac joint and relieves the pain enormously. It helps re-alignment

Table 2. Improvements Noted in Existing Condition.

types of benefits experienced, as given by the participants.

### Recommendations

Of the 100 returned logs, 78 (78%) stated that they would recommend the Chi Exerciser to others. Nineteen (19%) participants failed to comment on this aspect and three (three per cent) stated that they would not recommend to others.

Of the practitioners making specific recommendations, ten stated that they would recommend specifically for those who do not or could not take exercise in any other form. These included a Sports Therapist who would 'recommend the exerciser to clients who find it difficult to exercise actively'.

There were also other specific recommendations in the area of back problems and stress. One participant, a

Physiotherapist, would recommend to anyone who 'had stiffness in the joints'.

Of the three participants who stated that they wouldn't recommend, two felt that they had not received any specific benefits themselves, whilst one had found the movement caused nausea.

### Negative Aspects

Whilst in most cases any negative symptoms arising from using the Exerciser dissipated after a short time of regular use, there were three cases where the negative symptoms were severe enough to cause the participant to discontinue use altogether. In one case, use was discontinued after the third session, which had triggered a migraine; another participant discontinued after five days due to an aggravation of ME symptoms. The third participant discontinued after

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eight days as they found the movement too vigorous (even at 80 rpm), which caused nausea.

Seven participants found that using the exerciser aggravated problems in the knee area, usually through hyperextension of the knee. In most cases this was alleviated through placing a pillow or padding under the thighs just above the knee. There was one case where this discomfort continued and led to withdrawal from the trial after 15 days.

The only other negative comments were suggestions regarding design improvements.

### Conclusion

Overall, this trial has confirmed the ease of use of the Chi Exerciser, and its broad range of potential benefits. The Surge of Chi Exerciser has been shown to benefit participants at all three levels – physical, mental and emotional.

On a physical level, regular use benefited each individual in ways that were apparently appropriate to their body's needs. As well as general improvements in energy, tension, back pain and sleep, participants generally reported having gained specific benefits such as

improvements in skin health, breathing quality, circulation, etc.

Improvements were also seen on a mental and emotional level by a large percentage of participants. The general areas of improvement reported were improved mental clarity and focus, along with the ability to cope better with everyday stress. Again improvements at this level were very individual, based it would seem on the body's own priorities.

The ability to vary the speed was found to be important, with many participants commenting that each individual apparently has an optimum speed which suits their constitution.

The Auto Programmes appear to have a variety of perceived benefits, depending on the individual, with identified effects ranging from relaxing and calming to invigorating and energizing.

The trials showed that experience clearly tends to vary from person to person, depending upon their condition, but that it is generally an enjoyable one, mentally, emotionally and physically. It has underlined the importance of providing users with a wide range of speeds and other programming possibilities, so that they can experiment and find the speed

and comfort levels that best suit their age, fitness level and general state of health. Since regular use is of greatest benefit, the 'enjoyment factor' is important in helping to motivate frequent use.

The results of this trial have encouraged plans for further investigation into clinical use and recommended treatment protocols, to which end a second phase of trials is now being planned.

### About the Author

Hannah McDonald trained as a Nutritionist at the Institute for Optimum Nutrition and has a successful practice in Gloucestershire. She specializes in a multi-discipline approach working closely with Osteopaths, Cranial Osteopaths, Chiropractors, Homeopaths and Energy Healers. Hannah has been working with the Surge of Chi Exerciser for the last two years and was responsible for devising, running and collating the results of the 2005 trials. She is currently working on a further set of trials looking specifically at clinical use of the Surge of Chi Exerciser. Hannah can be contacted on [hannah@energy-for-health.co.uk](mailto:hannah@energy-for-health.co.uk)