

Your HEALTH

A Guide To Healthy Living For You And Your Family

SECTION **H**

L.V. Health Watch H2

L.V. Support Groups H3

Living Well H4

Chinese Health Balls are one of the many traditional wellness practices

An ANCIENT SPIN ON MEDICINE



Photos by ROB UPTON / Special To The Morning Call

Class instructor Pingjian Zhao (right) helps class member Wilmer Nester of Pen Argyl with his handling technique during a class at Easton Hospital on the benefits of Chinese health balls. Nester took the class, taught by health-ball expert Zhao. The class examined benefits of the balls used on hands and feet.

By JOANNA PONCAVAGE
Of The Morning Call

Clunk.
Clunk.
Clunk.

Small, heavy balls are dropping to the floor of a classroom in Easton Hospital's red-brick Clinic Building.

A dozen people of various ages, seated in the little desk chairs, are trying to roll the balls smoothly round and round their palms. It's not an American sport; sometimes the balls escape.

Made in various colors, sizes and materials, the balls are commonly known as "Chinese health balls," or sometimes "qi-gong" balls, which translates as "working on the energy."

The health-ball class is one of several traditional Chinese topics offered by the hospital as part of its wellness program and community outreach.

The way instructor Pingjian Zhao shows how it's done, rolling two balls around in the hand is a delicate, controlled movement, about as low-impact as physical exercise can be.

These hand movements exercise the fingers and increase their strength, says Zhao, who teaches a wide variety of Chinese health classes and is known as Ping. But the practice has a reputation for wider benefits.

"For thousands of years, Chinese people have believed that the balls can lead to a long life," says Zhao. "It is an easy way for people to take care of themselves."

First, two balls in the right hand, rotated clockwise. Two balls in the left hand, rotated counter-clockwise. Then, two balls in each hand, rotated outwardly. Two balls in each hand, rotated inwardly. And so on.

After half an hour or so of balls in the hands in various combinations and directions, Zhao asks all

to remove their shoes.

Placing one ball under each foot, students roll it back and forth from toe to heel. "The feet work better than the hand," she says.

Saying that rolling balls around in your hands or under your feet is good for you is one thing. Explaining why is a little more involved.

First, there are some basic principles of health care that Chinese people accept without question, but that may seem exotic to Americans.

Traditional Chinese medicine is based on the concept that life force energy (chi or qi) is the intangible force that animates all activity. Wellness is a function of a balanced, harmonious flow of chi.

See ROLLING Page H2 ▶



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When rolled in the hand, Chinese health balls massage pressure points and increase joint flexibility.



The instructor moves her foot over a golf ball as class members follow her guidance.