Guide to the 12 Meridians

Class 1

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What we’ll cover in this class:

- 12 Meridians
- Lung Meridian
- Large Intestine Meridian
- Putting Yin and Yang to Practical Use with the Meridians
- Spleen Meridian
- Stomach Meridian
- Spleen and Stomach Working Together
- Meridians, Qi and Points
- What’s the Point?
- Lung Points
- Large Intestine Points
- Spleen Points
- Stomach Points
There are twelve meridians—six on the arms and six on the legs. They’re on both the right and left side of the body. So, just remember that when we say there are six meridians on the arms, we mean six on the right arm and six on the left arm. They flow down the front and back of the arms and legs—three on the front of each limb and three on the back.

We know Chinese medicine is all about Yin and Yang, which applies to the human body in many ways. In relation to the meridians, we will talk about the surfaces of the body—the front is Yin and the back is Yang.

- Back of left arm: three Yang meridians
- Back of right arm: three Yang meridians
- Front of left arm: three Yin meridians
- Front of right arm: three Yin meridians

- Back of left leg: three Yang meridians
- Back of right leg: three Yang meridians
- Front of left leg: three Yin meridians
- Front of right leg: three Yin meridians

The Yang surface, the back (also called the “posterior”), is the more protective side of our body. If you touch the skin on the back of your arm and then on the inside of your arm, you can feel that the inside, or the “Yinside” (get it?), is a little more sensitive. It doesn’t have the tougher exterior of the Yang surface. It’s the same with the inside and outside of your legs. (We may talk about the “front” and “back” of your legs but we’re really referring to the inside and outside.)

The meridians are all grouped into Yin and Yang pairs. In the legs, the Spleen meridian (Yin) is paired with the Stomach meridian (Yang); the Liver meridian (Yin) is paired with the Gallbladder meridian (Yang); and the Kidney meridian (Yin) is paired with the Bladder meridian (Yang).

In the arms, the Lung meridian (Yin) is paired with the Large Intestine meridian (Yang); the Pericardium meridian (Yin) is paired with the San Jiao meridian (or Triple Heater—Yang) and the Heart meridian (Yin) is paired with the Small Intestine meridian (Yang).

I know this is a lot of information. Don’t worry. We’re going to break it down into four classes. We’ll do four meridians in each of the first three classes, then we’ll talk about how to work with the meridians. So, there’s no need to get overwhelmed here at the beginning.
The Lung meridian travels through the lungs and large intestine inside the body. Each meridian has an internal and external pathway. The internal pathway can sometimes take twists and turns within the body—the Lung meridian, for instance, connects the lungs, loops around the neck, and then moves through the outer front of the shoulder.

The external pathway runs down the arm and that’s what we’ll be focusing on in this class.

However, it is important to be aware of the internal pathways as well because that’s where the Qi flows through the body.

So, when you look at images of the meridians, you’re going to see the internal pathway mapped out. You’ll also only see the meridian drawn on one limb. You just have to imagine it on the other limb.

There are important, energetic points on each meridian where you can access the Qi directly. We won’t get into all of these points but we will talk about a few of the important ones. The Lung meridian officially “begins” at a point on the chest over the left lung, where the internal pathway comes to the surface. That’s the first external point where it begins and it runs down the Yin surface of the arm, along the “thumb side.” The Lung meridian ends on the thumb, near the outside of the nail, by the lower corner of the nail. Try pinching your thumbnail with your other hand. You can activate the entire meridian that way.

The lungs are all about the breath, right? So we can use this meridian to boost our Qi, support breathing, and strengthen the respiratory system to prevent colds and flus.
The Lung meridian is paired with the Large Intestine meridian, which is its Yang partner. The Large Intestine meridian runs up the arm along the Yang side. It begins on the index finger, at the base of the nail bed, and on the side of the nail closest to the thumb.

The cool thing about this placement is that it runs directly above the Lung meridian. So, it’s like we’ve got the Yin and Yang pair mirroring each other as they run along the arm. And again, the nature of Yin and Yang is kind of reflected in the different textures of the skin on your arm.

Chinese medicine is mostly based on observation. Therefore, the more you pay attention to little things like this, the more you can see Yin and Yang at work in the body.

The Large Intestine meridian runs up your arm and if you bend your elbow to examine the crease at your elbow, you can find a big Large Intestine point. It’s on the outside of your elbow crease, close to the bone.

Trace your finger from the outside of your elbow crease, down the Yang side of your arm (near where it becomes the Yin side of your arm), ending at the tip of your first finger. That’s the path that your Large Intestine meridian takes.

Now, trace your finger from your elbow crease, up toward your shoulder. Just move straight up with no wavering. That is still the Large Intestine meridian’s path.

The meridian crosses your shoulder, moves up the side of your neck and ends at your nostril. This makes sense because this is all connected with the lungs and breathing. We can actually use the Large Intestine meridian for all kinds of respiratory issues. It can help open up the nose, clear up congestion, a sore throat, a cold, or any condition where your head is congested.

The plan is to use the Yang meridians to reduce any kind of pain that exists within their pathways. So, we could also use the Large Intestine meridian for something like tennis elbow. Just rub around on the main meridian points to get the Qi moving.

If you hold up your own arm, you can see the place where the Yang side of your body meets the Yin side. You can also see this pretty easily on your hand, in the difference between the top of your hand and your palm. Notice where the skin changes in texture and color. There’s less hair on the Yin side. The same thing happens on your feet. Get used to observing that difference. It can be very helpful in your practice.
Putting Yin and Yang to Practical Use with the Meridians

The concept is that we want to bring Yin energy to the Yin meridians and bring Yang energy to the Yang meridians. This isn’t a hard and fast rule, but it’s frequently the case, and a great place to start.

We use the Yin meridians to deeply nourish the organs connected with them because Yin has such a strong nourishing and supportive energy. When working with them, we usually go slower, working more quietly, and building up to deeper pressure. (Don’t just go shoving into the Yin meridians though. Start with skin contact, then take your time and gently sink through the layers of tissue to figure out what feels right.)

If we want to build up and nourish the lungs, we’ll use the Lung meridian directly. However, if there’s something going on with the lungs—congestion, for example—then we’ll use the Large Intestine meridian. Together, this pair of meridians has more power to create change and bring balance back to this organ system, than if we worked with just one meridian.

When we’re working with a Yang meridian, we can be a little more vigorous. We can use a lighter touch because we’re working more quickly. The attitude to have here is that we’re using Yang energy to work with the Yang meridian. This is how we get the energy flowing, clear out heat (for a fever), and flush out pathogens and congestion. We would use the more active, Yang meridian to address the symptoms of a cold. Then use the quieter, Yin meridian to build up and stabilize the lungs to get more Qi.

The Large Intestine meridian is also great to address any pain that occurs anywhere along its pathway.
The Spleen and Stomach are our next pairing. We’re working with leg meridians now. Just remember that with the legs, the Yin and Yang sides don’t equate to the front and back of the legs. They’re more aligned with the inside and outside of the legs. You can feel how the skin on the outside of your thigh, and even wrapping around to the back, is different from the skin on the inside of your thigh. Those are the Yin and Yang areas on the legs.

The Spleen meridian is Yin, and it’s closer to the front of your leg than any other. It begins on the big toe at the medial base of the nail bed (on the outside of the toe). It runs up the leg and moves internally at the top of the thigh near the groin area. Then it comes closer to the surface on the abdomen, travels up the side of the body, and ends on the side of your chest between the 6th and 7th ribs.

The Spleen meridian is key to digestive function, absorbing nutrients, and having plenty of great Qi and vitality. It’s also a very important meridian for women in terms of our reproductive health.
Stomach Meridian

The Stomach meridian is paired with the Spleen meridian. It’s a big, long, Yang meridian and it’s a little special because it’s found on the chest and belly—the Yin side of your body. It’s the only Yang meridian on the Yin side of your body. (I know, I know—I said the Yang meridians were all on the back! I promise we won’t be breaking the rules every time!)

It begins just below the eye, then goes down the cheek to the jaw, and then turns to come back up to the “corner of the head.” Then the Stomach meridian comes back down the head, goes down the throat, down the chest, across the abdomen and then runs along the Yang surface of the leg (just a little to the outside of the thigh and lower leg).

The Stomach meridian comes across the front of the ankle and ends on the second toe. (Just like the Lung and Large Intestine meridians are on the thumb and index finger, the Spleen and Stomach meridians are on the big toe and second toe.)
Stomach Meridian

ST 1

ST 25

ST 36

ST 45
The Spleen and Stomach meridians are all about digestion, and they work with the digestive system in the same way the Lung and Large Intestine meridians work with the respiratory system. So, this means if we have digestive issues, like ulcers, bloating or cramps, we use the Stomach meridian, which is Yang, to clear all that out. Then we can go in with the Spleen meridian, which is Yin; to strengthen, support, and balance the digestive system. That helps us absorb more nutrients.

I think it’s so cool that the Stomach meridian goes along the mouth and jaw. Chewing is a big part of digestion, right? It’s Yang, so we can use it to clear up issues in its path, which means things like tooth abscesses. And like the Yang, Large Intestine meridian, we can use the Stomach meridian to clear out heat.

Let’s talk about heat for a little bit here. Heat is fever, inflammation, an abscess, or an acidic stomach. It’s all those hot, inflamed things that can get swollen, red, and painful. So, that’s what the Yang meridians can help clear out and with practice you’ll know which meridian to use.

Just like it’s cool that the Stomach meridian goes along the mouth and jaw, which are important for digestion, it’s pretty cool that the Stomach meridian runs through the nipple. It makes sense if you think in terms of nourishment, right? The stomach and spleen are all about feeding ourselves, nourishment, nutrition, digestion—all of that good stuff.

In terms of positioning, the Stomach meridian is on the outside of the leg, along the same side as our pinky toe (but it doesn’t end at the pinky toe). The Spleen meridian is on the inside of your leg, directly opposite. Remember how the Lung and Large Intestine meridians mirror each other as they run up your arm? Well, the Stomach and Spleen meridians do the same thing as they run up your leg. All the paired meridians mirror one another this way.

By the way, the Stomach meridian goes through your ankle—right through the outside of your ankle. Then it crosses the top of your foot and ends out on the second toe. It’s like the Yang side of your body twists a little as your leg becomes your foot. The Spleen meridian goes through the ankle on the inside of your foot. It doesn’t have to cross the foot, though—it just travels through the arch and ends in your big toe.
Meridians are where the Qi flows through the body and points are places along each meridian where you can access that Qi. So, we can use points to clear up anything in the immediate area.

If there’s any pain present, that usually means Qi is blocked in that area. So, you just rub that point a bit but it’s not just a muscle massage. Hold in mind your intention of moving Qi as you massage the point. Ask yourself: “How do I move Qi?” Let your body answer. Think of it as a moving meditation, a kind of contact meditation. Let your left brain kind of just move to the back and observe what happens. Trust what emerges from your body and it will work. You’ll be moving Qi and issues will clear up more quickly, and you might even be surprised at yourself. “Hey, that really worked!” It’s really an amazing experience. So, I encourage you to take your time and really experiment with it.

One point affects the entire meridian. You can be working down on the toe of the Stomach meridian and it can help ease a toothache. That’s pretty cool.

So, a point affects its immediate location and it affects the whole meridian. They also have broader effects, which took thousands of years for people to figure out. For example, one point might move Qi in general through the body; another point might nourish Yin throughout the whole body. Those are more physiological effects.

Just keep in mind that for almost every point, there are three different potential effects: the immediate area, the meridian and the body as a whole. Don’t make yourself crazy with this. Just keep it in mind as you experiment and contemplate. Then just see what comes up.
What’s the Point?

Way back at the beginning of all this meridian medicine and Chinese healing, the points were given names, not numbers. However, the Chinese language uses images instead of letters, so translating all that was a little tough for foreigners. To make it easier, Westerners gave the points numbers.

However, even that was pretty complicated. First of all, the Chinese characters were translated into something called “Pinyin.” Pinyin was created by Germans, which creates another step in the translation process. So, then we have the name of the point in Pinyin, written in the Roman alphabet.

Let’s talk about Lung point 2, or Lung 2, the second point on the Lung meridian. In Pinyin, it’s “Yun Men.” I think it’s something of a loss that we only use numbers for the point names. The true names were figured out by sages and there’s so much poetry within them that we can’t easily comprehend. For instance, Lung 2’s true name is something like: “Cloud Gate.” If you let yourself think about that for a long time, it can really teach you a lot about the point. If you spend time with each point—touching it, sensing it, contemplating the name, etc.—you can develop a deeper understanding of the points.

Although it is a lot easier to just say Lung 2, isn’t it?

There are 365 points and they’re all numbered. Each meridian has a different amount of points. The Lung meridian has 11 points, the Large Intestine meridian has 20 points, the Stomach meridian has 45 points and the Spleen meridian has 21 points. We’re just going to talk about a few points on each meridian.
Lung Points

Feel your clavicle (your collarbone) and move your fingers out toward your shoulder. Keep your fingers on the underside of your collarbone. That’s where Lung 2 is, right there on the edge.

Here’s a little trick for finding it. Take your thumb and point it right back toward the inner part of your shoulder. If you raise your elbow out in front of you, your thumb will feel a little hollow open up beneath your clavicle, wedged in by the side of your shoulder. You’ve just found Lung 2! Or you can call it Yun Men or Cloud Gate if you feel special.

Here’s another trick. I’m full of tricks. Put your hand straight out in front of you like you’re going to shake someone’s hand. Then feel into the point area (with the hand that’s not outstretched), and you’ll feel this deep, soft indentation. Congratulations, you’ve found Lung 2 again.

By the way, if you hold yourself in a way that keeps the point open on both sides, that’s great posture. It opens up your chest to support strong breathing. Lung 2 is a great point to work if someone has a hard time breathing or even if they’re stressed and just need to take a deep breath (sometimes we breathe shallowly when we’re stressed). Just focusing on opening up this point can circulate a lot of air and energy.

To find Lung 1, just go straight down about an inch from Lung 2. When you’re on the rib cage, you’ve got Lung 1—the beginning of the meridian.

After Lung 2, the Lung meridian goes up and outside of the biceps. And it travels along the thumb side of the forearm.

We’re going to talk about one more Lung point—Lung 10. This is a great point to help relieve a sore throat. I know that contradicts what I told you earlier—that we use Yang meridians to relieve symptoms and this is a Yin meridian. However, Lung 10 is a special Yin point. Over hundreds of years, people recognized that working with Lung 10 also helped to relieve sore throats.

Lung 10 is on the fleshy part of your palm at the base of your thumb. There’s a bone in there reaching from your wrist to your lowest thumb joint. You can find the ends of it with the index finger and thumb of your opposite hand. Find the middle of that bone, where the Yin and Yang skin of your hand meet—so closer to your palm side. If you run your finger along that bone, you’ll feel a little dip. When you press, you may feel a little discomfort there. The physical dip is important because that’s where the point is located.

See, you’re already an expert on Lung 2 and Lung 10.
Large Intestine Points

Now we’re up to Large Intestine 4. Don’t use this point on women who are pregnant, unless you want to induce contractions and labor; it has the tendency to do that.

Large Intestine 4’s big claim to fame is that it relieves headaches. You may already be aware of this. It’s one of those things floating around out there in the general public. Remember, this meridian goes across the jaw and ends at the nose. So, it can help with tooth pain, jaw pain and sinus issues. It’s paired with the Lung meridian, so it can also help with coughs. Not to mention that it’s good for local pain right there on the hand. Open your hand and lightly pinch around in the pad between your thumb and index finger. You should get a sense of it right in the center of that pad. Feel free to press, but it may be very sensitive, so be aware of that.

Then we have another important point, Large Intestine 20. This one helps clear up sinus pain, clears out your nose and can even open up the Qi in the area to ease toothaches. It’s located right next to your nostril. So if you put your finger there and press—and you may have to push your nose out of the way a little bit—you’ll feel a little dip. That’s Large Intestine 20.
Spleen Points

Spleen 6 is another point you don’t want to use with pregnant women. Although it is great for menstrual pain, other PMS symptoms and overall menstrual health. To find Spleen 6, go to the inner ankle bone. Reach down with your hand and place the tip of your pinky finger on the highest point of your inner ankle bone. (You’re using the opposite hand of whatever ankle you choose. So, if you’re touching your right ankle bone, use your left hand.) Where your palm lands is the area of Spleen 6. Press around in that area, right on the inside of your leg.

Moving on to Spleen 15. This one is right on the belly. Spleen 15 is extremely helpful for digestive issues and it also nourishes the Spleen itself—which leads to improved digestion.

Spleen 15 is located straight across from the belly button, right at the edge of one of the abdominal muscles you see if you have a six-pack. If you don’t have a six-pack, you can find the area of Spleen 15 by going straight across from the belly button and straight down from the nipple. Spleen 15 is located where the two lines meet.

I’m going to teach you another method of measurement for these things. Since everyone’s body is a different size, we can’t just say “four inches to the right” because that would mean different things on different people. This measurement is called a “cun,” pronounced “Tsoon.” (It’s spelled that way because of Pinyin; I can’t explain it.) The cun is your thumb width. It translates to an inch, but it’s a personal inch—your inch is going to be different from your neighbor’s inch. No judging.

So, if you’re working on someone else, just glance at their thumb and see if it’s wider or narrower than yours. That will make it easier to adjust to another person’s measurements, so you can find their points more easily.

Spleen 15 is 4 cun from the navel.
Stomach 25 is 2 cun away from the navel on the same horizontal line as Spleen 15. If you’re just sitting around on the couch, you can massage these points. They won’t feel anything like Large Intestine 4 in the webbing of your index finger and thumb. However, you’ll be able to notice these points on your stomach with some practice.

Stomach 36 is known as the command point of the abdomen. So, if there’s anything going on in your abdomen at all, Stomach 36 will help. I can’t say enough about how helpful this point is for all things digestion and all things Qi. Do you want more Qi? Work Stomach 36 and you get more Qi.

Stomach 36 is called “Zu San Li,” which means “Leg Three Miles” or “Walk Three Miles.” Let’s say you have no problem running two miles but then you can’t go anymore; massage this point and then you can go for three miles.

Stomach 36 is on the outside of your lower leg, just below your knee. Sit in a chair and wrap your hand around your knee, with your index finger lined up just below your kneecap (so, you’re not actually touching your knee . . . sorry for mixing you up there). Remember, it’s on the outside of the leg, not the inside. (That’s a totally different point and will get you a totally different effect.) Where your pinky lands, on the outside of your shin bone, is the area of Stomach 36.
Wrapping It All Up

Your thinking mind can help you put all this information together, maybe combined with some of the information you’ve learned in other classes. Although your feeling, experiencing, and wondering self is the most helpful when contacting the points. You can use that intuitive sense for figuring out the right pressure, how long to work the points and all that good stuff. Let your linear thoughts take a break—or take notes, if they can’t take a break—and pay attention to yourself or whoever you’re working on. Ask them if they want more or less pressure, or if they need more attention on a particular point.

Go easy on yourself if you’re a newcomer to working with the points and meridians. The best research to help you understand this is your own experience. It’s not something you can master by reading books or looking at diagrams. Learning the meridians also means learning your own intuition, which is a skill that can help in every area of your life.