

## Yiquan Training: Upward Punch (*Zuan Quan*, 钻拳)

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Yiquan uses Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) to train and condition your mind-body, to synthesize your neuromuscular system into unitary whole-body harmony (*Zheng Ti Xie Tiao*, 整体协调). Mental directed activities (imaging) and physical repetitions (modeling) are used to program your brain and nervous system, to ingrain maneuvers into muscle memory, and to re-pattern your neuromuscular coordination and motor skills.

For self defense, you must acquire appropriate whole-body neuromuscular coordination to perform *basic skills* with harmony of actions and harmony of force, and free your conscious mind to concentrate on the solution to neutralizing your opponent's attack and defense. There are no secret maneuvers/techniques, only basic skills performed really well. First, you should never use more complex movements than are necessary to achieve the desired result. The maneuvers/techniques must remain *simplistic*. The more complicated a maneuver is; the more there is the chance of counter-offensive movement. Second, you must be able to put your whole-body balanced force (*Hun Yuan Li*, 浑元力) into your strikes, merging all force components as *one* (*Quan Shen Li Yi*, 全身力一). Finally, you must achieve *un-conscious competence* i.e., to execute the right move at the right time automatically (*Zi Dong Hua*, 自动化). Skills must become spontaneous reflexes. Internalizing basic skills as spontaneous reflexes can only be achieved through prolong training and conditioning with push hands (*Tui Shou*, 推手), sparring (*Shi Zhan*, 实战), and crisis rehearsal (*Jia Xiang Di*, 假想敌) exercises.

In this article, we will explore a basic punching skill: the upward punch (*Zuan Quan*, 钻拳).

For the upward punch, you must adhere to Yiquan's use of curve physical form to deliver linear whole-body balanced force (*Xing Qu Li Zhi*, 形曲力直) and take up power from the ground through your optimally *aligned* and *connected* musculoskeletal structure (*Lian Tong Yi Guan*, 连通一贯). With kinesthetic perception, you must seek, sense, and cultivate the pathways of force transmission (*Xun Zhao Jing Lu*, 寻找劲路) from the ground to your punching hand. Push off with your legs, open all joints in a coordinated concurrent sequential overlapping motion, twist your torso to drive the shoulder forward, then the shoulder drives the elbow and the elbow drives the hand upward, forward and inward along your central line. While the vertical isometric opposing force pair (*Shang Xia Zheng Li*, 上下争力) between your feet and head (mildly stretching your spine) is dominant in this punch, you must pay attention to all the other isometric opposing force pairs (*Ti Cha Zheng Li*, 体察争力): between your knees, between your hands, and between your hands and neck etc.

The natural rotations of your body and limbs (*Luo Xuan*, 螺旋) are crucial elements. Prior to punching, your torso is square-on to your opponent; when executing the upward punch your torso is angled (bladed) towards your opponent.

You must gain total control of your neuromuscular relaxation/tension exchanges. You should be relaxed most of the time. As your punch connects, focus your musculature (*Yi Chu Ji Fa*, 一触即发), twist and snap your forearm to palm facing your face and drive through your target, tense momentarily (*Yi Fa Ji Zhi*, 一发即止), immediately relax, bounce back to your on-guard posture as if hitting your hand on a red-hot iron plate, and be ready for the follow-up punch.

## Lead Hand Upward Punch

Start from the left lead small step fighting posture; tug in your chin (visualize holding a small balloon between your chin and neck); keep your elbows prop out (visualize holding balloons in your armpits); hands closed loosely as if holding eggs (*Xu Wo*, 虚握), palms facing down. Visualize imaginary springs between your wrists, between your wrists and your neck, between your knees, and between your feet and your head. Your weight distribution is 30% on your front leg and 70% on your rear leg. Visualize directing a small force pushing your front knee forward and upward, and a small force pushing your rear hip backward and downward. Visualize holding a balloon between your knees; direct the forces below the knees inwards; direct the forces above the knees outwards. Keep your weight bias towards the balls of your feet; do not put much weight on your heels but do not lift them off the ground.

Make certain you have no tension in your elbows, shoulders and legs. Push off with your rear leg (shifting your weight forward), simultaneously *drill* (*Zuan*, 钻) your lead leg into the ground pivoting on the ball of your lead foot (turning the heel slightly outward), un-coil your back, opening all joints in a coordinated concurrent sequential overlapping motion, stretching the imaginary spring between your knees, shovel your hip up by straightening your lead leg (stretching the imaginary spring between your lead foot and head), torque your torso to your right driving your left shoulder forward. Your weight distribution is 70% on your front leg and 30% on your rear leg.

Simultaneously, move your left elbow inward and upward propelling your lead hand upward, forward, and inward along your central line towards an imaginary target in front of your forehead. As your punch connects, twist your forearm along its axis, snapping your hand from palm facing right to palm facing your face (*Quan Da Cun Jing*, 拳打寸劲); tense your muscles as if crushing the imaginary eggs in your hands. Push your head up slightly so there is a rotation and stretching of your spine (visualize stretching the imaginary spring from your lead foot to your head). Simultaneously, pull your rear hand backward, outward and slightly downward to a guard position; visualize breaking the string between your wrists or visualize tearing a cotton sheet between your hands. Punch through your target, focus (tense your muscles as if crushing the imaginary eggs in your hands) when your hand connects the target, then immediately relax, retract your punching hand as if hitting on a red-hot iron plate and bounce back to your on-guard small step fighting posture. Be ready for the next punch.

NOTE: Keep your legs bent before striking; straighten them suddenly as you send in the punch (do not lock your knees). When stepping in with the punch, your punch, your foot and your head should *arrive simultaneously*.

## Rear Hand Upward Punch

To execute the upward punch with your right rear hand from a left lead, be sure to drive with your rear leg, use torso rotation and shift your weight forward. The power comes from pushing off the right rear leg, thrusting the right hip forward (the left hip backward), torque the torso to drive your right shoulder to drive your right arm upward, forward, and inward along your central line towards an imaginary target in front of your forehead. Pivot your torso on an axis from your rear foot to your head, over your lead foot. As your punch connects, twist your forearm along its axis, snapping your right hand from palm facing left to palm facing your face; tense your muscles as if crushing the imaginary eggs in your hands. Push your head up slightly so there is a rotation and stretching of your spine; visualize stretching the imaginary spring from your rear foot to your head. Simultaneously, pull your left hand backward, outward and slightly downward to a guard position; visualize breaking the string between your wrists or visualize tearing a cotton sheet between your hands. Punch through your target, focus (tense your muscles as if crushing the imaginary eggs in your hands) when your hand connects the target, then immediately relax, retract your punching hand as if hitting on a red-hot iron plate, and bounce back to your on-guard small step fighting posture. Be ready for the follow-up punch.

## Training Procedure

Begin your training by practicing relaxed slow fixed step punches. Pay attention to kinesthetic perception of the force transmission pathways and proper body mechanics of *alignment*, and *connected-ness*. Harmony of action is prerequisite to harmony of force.

When you have a firm foundation in fixed step punches, combine it with footwork and work towards free step punches. We suggest practicing the following routines:

### Fixed step:

Single punches: Do single lead hand or rear hand upward punch from fixed step.

Double punches: Do lead hand and rear hand upward punches in sequence from fixed step.

Triple punches: Do lead hand, rear hand, and lead hand upward punches in sequence from fixed step.

### One step:

Single lead hand punches: Push off your rear leg, step your lead leg forward (shuffle step). As soon as your lead foot touches the ground, *drill* your lead leg into the ground, pivoting on the ball of your lead foot (turning the heel slightly outward), and simultaneously shoot your lead hand upward punch, then draw your rear leg forward into a small step on-guard posture.

Single rear hand punches: Push off your rear leg, step your lead leg forward (shuffle step). As your lead foot touches the ground, pivot on the ball of your rear foot (turning the heel slightly outward), and simultaneously shoot your rear hand upward punch, then draw your rear leg forward into a small step on-guard posture.

Double punches: Do one step single lead hand upward punch. Then do fixed step rear hand upward punch.

Triple punches: Do one step double punches. Then do fixed step lead hand upward punch.

### **Two steps:**

Double punches: Do one step lead hand punch. Then do one step rear hand punch.

Triple punches: Do two steps double punches. Then do fixed step lead hand punch.

### **Three steps:**

Triple punches: Do two steps double punches. Then do one step lead hand punch.

### **Running punches:**

Push off your lead leg, step your rear leg forward as in jogging. As your rear leg becomes your lead leg and the foot touches the ground, pivot on the ball of your rear foot (turning the heel slightly outward), and simultaneously shoot your rear hand upward punch. Then push off your lead leg and repeat as you jog forward.

### **Examples:**

Upward/forward *drilling* punches can be used to defense against straight punches. When using upward punches defensively, as soon as your forearm contacts your opponent's, be sure to twist your forearm to redirect your opponent's force.

*Drill* upward punch to your opponent's inside; then attack his central line: From a left lead posture, draw a left lead, then step forward slightly to your left (side step), twist quickly to your left to deliver a short, sharp rear upward punch with your right. Your punching right arm should obstruct or raise your opponent's left arm.

*Drill* upward punch to your opponent's outside; then press down to his inside (wrapping) while *drilling* up with your other hand.

## **Tactic:**

Change your opponent's force direction on contact; release power explosively at any point of contact. Use your opponent's guard against him. Synthesize offensive and defensive movements as one (*Gong Shou He Yi*, 攻守合一).

By coordinating your two hands in a frontal attack (*Shuang Shou Qi Chu*, 双手齐出), you eliminate the necessity of pure defensive movements. Defend your central line; attack your opponent's target on his central line (*Shou Zhong Yong Zhong*, 守中用中).

If your hands miss your targets, bend your arms and strike up with your elbows or strike with your shoulders. Power discharge/releases (*Fa Li*, 发力) from elbow strikes are the same as that of punches but requires larger torso pivoting.

## **Conclusion**

We have briefly explored the basic training of Yiquan's upward punch. When you have mastered free step punches, you should use them in push hands and sparring training to gain proper timing, distance, and angle of attack, to internalize your skills into spontaneous reflexes. Combine upward punches with various stepping patterns; practice punching with either hand from any starting position. Be creative and use push hands as preparation of sparring (*Tui Duan Shou Jie He*, 推断手结合) to try things out. If you have any questions, the answers can usually be found in sparring it out.