



A 10-MINUTE WORKBOOK

The Guarding Self-Assessment

*Find out which of the three layers is
holding your tension – and what to
do first.*

FASCIA • BREATH • NERVOUS SYSTEM



Your body is not tight. It is guarding.

Those are two different problems, and they do not answer to the same thing. One of them answers to stretching. The other one has been ignoring your stretching for years.

Twenty-one questions from here, you will know which one you are dealing with.

How to use this

10

MINUTES

3

LAYERS

21

QUESTIONS

1

PLACE TO START

You do not need to know anything about qigong. You do not need to be flexible. You just need to be honest.

There are three checklists in here, one for each layer where the body holds tension. Each list has seven lines. If a line sounds like you, tick it. If it does not, leave it blank. Do not think too hard about any single line — your first answer is usually the true one.

At the end you add up each list. Your highest score is your dominant layer. That is where your body is doing most of the holding. That is where you start.

FOUR RULES FOR ANSWERING

01 Answer for the last three months. Not your worst week ever.

02 Tick it if it happens often. Not if it happened once.

03 Nobody is grading this. There is no good score and no bad score.

04 Print it if you can. Ticking a box with a pen makes you answer for real.

A tight muscle and a guarded muscle look the same from the outside. They are not the same thing.

TIGHT

Tight means short

The tissue has lost length. Stretch it and it lengthens. Keep stretching and it stays longer. Tight answers to what you do.

GUARDED

Guarded means held

Your body has decided the area is not safe to release. So it holds on. It keeps holding no matter how well you stretch.

You can stretch a guarded muscle every day for ten years and it is tight again by Wednesday. Letting go was never the problem it was solving.



HELD IN THREE PLACES

Guarding is never held in one spot. It is held in three at once.

MISS ONE

Reach one layer and it comes back. Reach two and it comes back slower.

REACH ALL THREE

Then it stops coming back. That is the whole idea of this workbook.

WHAT YOU WALK AWAY WITH

01

Three scores, and the one layer that is running the show.

02

One thing to do first, and one thing to stop wasting effort on.

03

A ten-minute daily practice you can start today.

Where guarding is held

Three layers, stacked. The one at the bottom sets the limit for the two above it.

01 Fascia

The web that wraps everything. It holds the shape.

02 Breath

A high, shallow breath keeps the alarm switched on all day.

03 Nervous system

Decides whether letting go is allowed at all.

↑ SETS THE CEILING • OVERRULES BOTH

This is why willpower does not work here, and why being told to relax has never once worked. Layer three does not report to the thinking part of your brain. Change layer three and the other two get easier. Ignore it and they keep resetting.





LAYER ONE

01 / 03

Fascia

The web that holds the shape

The web that holds the shape

Fascia is the thin, tough, wet tissue that wraps every muscle, every organ and every bone you have. It is not lots of separate wrappers. It is one continuous web, from the sole of your foot to the top of your head.

So it does not load in one place. It loads and locks as a whole. Which is why the place that hurts is very often not the place that is pulling.

Your neck hurts. The pull may be coming from an ankle you rolled years ago. Your low back aches. The pull may be sitting in your hip and your ribs. Treat the sore spot and you buy a few good hours. The web has not changed, so the sore spot comes back.

Fascia-held tension feels bound rather than sore. It is worst in the first minutes of moving, and better once you are warm.

Fascia: score yourself

Tick every line that sounds like you. Answer for the last three months.

Nobody sees this but you.

1 I am stiffest in the first few minutes of moving, and it eases once I get going. ☐

2 My tension moves around. It is my neck one month and my hip the next. ☐

3 It feels bound or stuck rather than sore, hot or burning. ☐

4 I have an old injury, and I can still feel how it changed the way I move. ☐

5 Stretching feels good while I do it, and the tightness is back within a day. ☐

6 One side of my body clearly feels different from the other. ☐

7 I hold the same position for hours most days. A desk, a car, a chair. ☐

LAYER ONE: FASCIA SCORE

out of 7



LAYER TWO

02 / 03

Breath

The switch you leave switched on

The switch you leave switched on

A fast, shallow breath high in the chest is what the body does under threat. It is built to last a few minutes. For most adults it never stops.

While the breath stays up there, the body keeps reading the same message: still not safe. So the guarding stays on all day. The ribcage and the diaphragm stay loaded, and the neck and shoulders end up doing the breathing.

20,000

BREATHS A DAY

Your neck was never built for that job. A few months in it is hard and sore, and you call it neck tension.

A high breath is invisible. Nobody has ever told you it was a problem. It only shows up as a neck that never stays loose.

Breath: score yourself

Same rules. Tick what sounds like you. Do not answer for how you breathe when you are thinking about breathing.

1 I cannot take a full, satisfying breath without forcing it. ☐

2 When I breathe in, my chest and shoulders rise more than my lower ribs widen. ☐

3 I sigh or yawn a lot, even when I am not tired. ☐

4 I hold my breath without meaning to when I concentrate or lift something. ☐

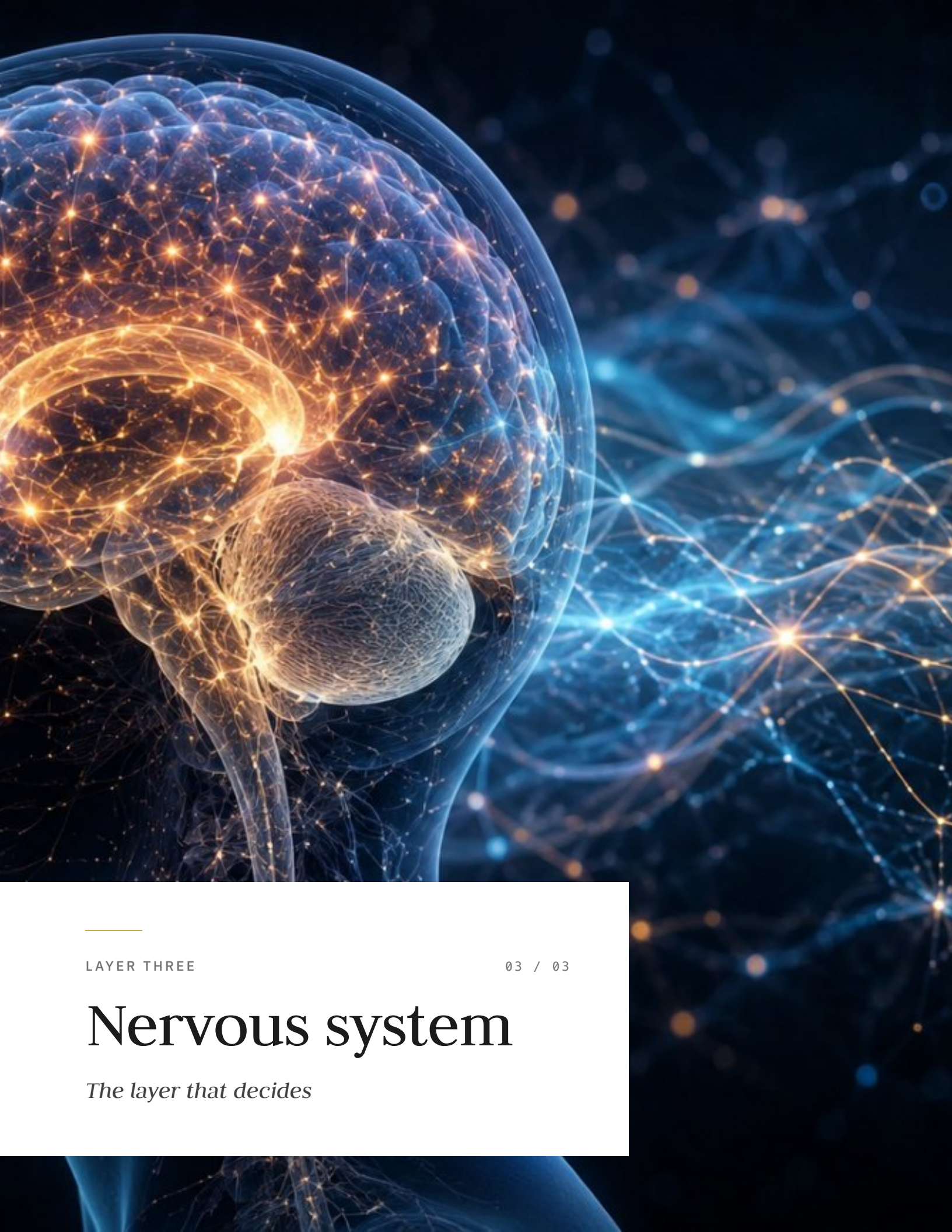
5 My jaw is tight, or I clench or grind my teeth. ☐

6 I get out of breath faster than my fitness should allow. ☐

7 When I am stressed, my breathing goes fast and high before I notice I am stressed. ☐

LAYER TWO: BREATH SCORE

out of 7



LAYER THREE

03 / 03

Nervous system

The layer that decides

The layer that decides

Your nervous system checks your safety all day long. Based on what it finds, it sets how much tension your body holds. Safe, and the tone drops. Not safe, and the tone stays up.

That decision is not made by the thinking part of your brain. It is made underneath it. This layer overrules the other two, and it decides whether release is allowed at all.

Which is why willpower does not touch it, and why being told to relax has never worked. It is also why a good massage wears off. It changed the tissue. It did not change the decision.

A high score here is not a character flaw and it is not permanent. It is a setting. Settings can be changed, just not by force.

Nervous system: score yourself

Last list. People under-tick these, because after enough years this stops feeling like a symptom and starts feeling like your personality.

-
- 1 I wake up already braced. Jaw, shoulders or stomach tight before the day starts. ☐
-
- 2 I startle easily at sudden noise or movement. ☐
-
- 3 Massage, physio or adjustment feels great and wears off within a day or two. ☐
-
- 4 I catch my shoulders up near my ears when nobody is watching. ☐
-
- 5 I am tired all day and then wired at night, or I sleep badly despite being exhausted. ☐
-
- 6 Sitting still and doing nothing makes me uncomfortable. ☐
-
- 7 I feel like I am waiting for something to go wrong, even when nothing is. ☐
-

LAYER THREE: NERVOUS SYSTEM SCORE

out of 7

Score it

Count your ticks in each list. Write the three numbers in the boxes.

LAYER ONE

Fascia

out of 7

LAYER TWO

Breath

out of 7

LAYER THREE

Nervous system

out of 7

WHAT EACH NUMBER MEANS

0–2

LOW

Not where your problem lives. Leave it alone for now.

3–4

PRESENT

Part of the picture, but not the thing driving it.

5–7

DOMINANT

This is where your body is doing the holding. Start here.

IF TWO SCORES TIE

If the nervous system is one of them, start there — it sets the ceiling for the other two. If the tie is between fascia and breath, start with breath. It is faster, and it makes the fascia work land better. All three high is common, and it is not bad news. It means the guarding is well established, not that you are broken.

What your dominant layer means

Find your highest score and read that block. The other two still matter. This is the one that pays you back fastest right now.

01 IF FASCIA IS HIGHEST

Move the whole web, not the sore spot

DO THIS FIRST

Slow, whole-body movement that reaches long lines. Move the body as one piece so the pull can travel and let go along the chain. Slow and long beats hard and short.

WASTED EFFORT

Chasing the sore spot. More rolling on the same shoulder, more treatment in the same place, stretching harder. You are treating the end of a pull that starts somewhere else.

02 IF BREATH IS HIGHEST

Get the breath back down

DO THIS FIRST

Move the breath into the lower ribs, and make the out-breath longer than the in-breath. Small daily doses win. Two minutes, four times a day, changes more than twenty minutes once a week.

WASTED EFFORT

Deep breathing that is really just bigger chest breathing. Hauling in a huge breath and lifting the shoulders is the same problem with more volume.

The layer most people skip

03 IF NERVOUS SYSTEM IS HIGHEST

Give the body evidence, not orders

DO THIS FIRST

Short, boring, repeated sessions of lying still, breathing out slowly and doing nothing. Your job is not to relax on command. Your job is to hand the body enough repeated evidence that it is safe, so it lowers the setting itself.

WASTED EFFORT

Hard workouts to burn the tension off, more stretching, and anything that asks you to force relaxation. Effort is the language of the problem. It cannot also be the cure.

You cannot force a body into safety. You can only give it evidence.

What changes if you get it right

These are the signs to watch for. Not a number on a chart — a change in how the first ten minutes of your day feel.

Fascia	Less of that bound, stuck feeling in the first minutes of the day.
Breath	A neck and shoulders that stop refilling with tension by mid-afternoon.
Nervous system	Treatment starts to hold. Sleep gets deeper before it gets longer.

Give any of it fourteen days before you judge it.
The body does not change its mind quickly, but
it does change its mind.

Your ten-minute daily practice

Three parts. One for each layer. Do them in this order, because each part makes the next one work better.

01	Slow floor decompression Fascia · let the web unload under its own weight	4 min
02	Lower-rib breathing Breath · take it out of the neck and put it back	3 min
03	Down-regulation hold Nervous system · the part that decides	3 min

Ten minutes a day beats one long session a week.



Slow floor decompression

Let the web unload under its own weight instead of being pulled.

01 Lie on your back on the floor, not a bed. Knees bent, feet flat, arms out to the sides, palms up.

02 Let the floor take your weight. Stop holding yourself in position.

03 Slowly let both knees fall to the right, as far as they go without forcing. Keep both shoulders down. Stay 60 seconds.

04 Come back through the middle. Repeat to the left. 60 seconds.

05 Then reach both arms overhead along the floor and both legs long. Hold 30 seconds, then let it all go and lie still for 30 seconds.

The floor is doing the work, not you. If you are gripping to hold the shape, you have gone too far — come back until it is boring.

Lower-rib breathing

Take the breath out of the neck and put it back where it belongs.

-
- 01 Stay on the floor, knees bent. One hand on your lower ribs at the side, one hand on your belly.
 - 02 Breathe in through the nose for a count of 4. Aim to widen the lower ribs sideways into your hand. Chest stays quiet. Shoulders do not move.
 - 03 Breathe out through the mouth, slow and soft, for a count of 6.
 - 04 Repeat for 3 minutes. That is around 18 breaths.
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IN THROUGH THE NOSE 4	OUT THROUGH THE MOUTH 6
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WHERE DOES YOUR BREATH ACTUALLY LAND?

COLLAR BONES AND NECK	Emergency use only. Not a place to live.
UPPER CHEST	Where most adults breathe all day.
LOWER RIBS	Where it should land.

If nothing widens at first, that is your answer, not your failure. Make the breath smaller and slower, not bigger. You are after width, not size.

Down-regulation hold

The part that decides whether the first two are allowed to stay.

-
- 01 Let the legs go long. Arms by your sides, palms up. Eyes closed, or open and soft.
 - 02 Do nothing. Let the breath do whatever it wants to do.
 - 03 On every out-breath, let one part of you get heavier into the floor. Work down the body in order.
 - 04 If your mind wanders, that is fine. Come back on the next out-breath.
 - 05 Stay for 3 minutes. Get up slowly.
-

ONE PART HEAVIER ON EVERY OUT-BREATH

JAW

SHOULDERS

HANDS

BELLY

HIPS

LEGS

Reach the legs, then start again at the jaw.

Do not try to relax. Trying is tension. Lie there and be boring.

IF YOU ONLY HAVE FIVE MINUTES

Do the part that matches your dominant layer, then always finish with this one. Never skip the ending. The ending is what tells the body it is allowed to keep what you just gave it.



WHERE TO GO NEXT

Ten minutes is a start. It is not a system.

You have your three numbers and a practice that reaches all three layers. Run it for a fortnight and you will feel the difference. Most people never get this far — they spend years stretching a body that was never asking to be longer.

What comes next is the part a workbook cannot do. Your dominant layer will shift as you work on it, and what you need in month three is not what you needed today. That is what the membership is for: structured practice that keeps pace with the body you are actually training.

KEEP PRACTISING

The White Tiger Qigong Membership

Keep your three scores. They are where you start.

[Explore the membership →](#)

Structured Daoist Qigong practice, taught through neuroscience, sports science and Chinese medicine.

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