

SHIATSU AND M.E.

CASE STUDIES

The following case studies are an extract from an article entitled 'severe M.E.' by Theresa Coe in the 'InterAction' magazine, issue 43, January 2003.

The Shiatsu Society database of research includes five papers published in peer-reviewed journals looking at the effect of shiatsu on severe angina, lower back pain, its value in palliative care, shiatsu massage for carers and a survey looking at conditions most commonly treated by shiatsu practitioners. In the last study, 73% of the qualified practitioners registered with the Shiatsu Society responded to a structured survey with musculo-skeletal and psychological problems reported as the most common conditions treated.

Case Study 1

Joelle Marlow

After experiencing a severe downturn I was finding it hard to cope emotionally with the social isolation of being housebound. I could not afford treatments, or physically get myself to therapy appointments outdoors.

I was working on increasing my care and befriending others with M.E. by phone to help me stay positive. But for physical treatment, shiatsu was the perfect solution. I had had it before the M.E. was diagnosed, so I knew what to expect.

To find a practitioner who would visit me at home, I thought of asking for a student. After leaving my number with a local Shiatsu college, a teacher eventually called me and I explained my position.

Within a few days a trainee called Patrick arranged to visit me. He was very professional, dealt with my distress and debilitation with calm and composure and also offered me more sessions than the norm as I was helped so much by the treatment. All sessions were free as he needed the practice as part of his training.

One thing that I found comforting was the way Shiatsu therapists lift your limbs before working on each of them, so you can be completely passive while they raise and rotate them to loosen the joints. Despite my being very weak and fragile Shiatsu never hurt, though those with severe pain or tenderness should explain this to the practitioner who can lessen the pressure used.

As with any complementary therapy, there are no guarantees of benefit –we are all different. However, of all the treatments I've tried, I think Shiatsu has been one of the safest I have encountered.

I felt that after a treatment the energy had been moved around inside my body – sort of given a gentle 'inner workout'. I also felt calmer and more connected to my body. Each session left me with a wonderful feeling: a combination of deep relaxation and

alertness. I am told that my eyes and skin visibly change after a treatment and I do feel as if I am 'glowing'.

If you feel physically depleted after a session this may not be a bad sign. I was so relaxed that I rested better than usual afterwards and paced myself more wisely. Resting after Shiatsu is vital as it gives the treatment more time to work on your system.

The happiness and peace I get from Shiatsu is as good as any drug – but legal and without any side effects! If I try to explain why I feel so positive after a session I can only say it's because it comes from inside, i.e. my body is happier – at least for a short while.

Case study 2 **Abigail Berman**

Sometimes with M.E. you are so accustomed to carrying your aches, low energy and muscle pain around, they become part of you. Until something happens to take them away, that is. Suddenly you feel lighter, you can stand taller and there is a vibrancy about you again. This is how I felt after my first session of Shiatsu, although the effects wore off after a day or two.

At each session my practitioner Sam made a 'palpatory diagnosis' by pressing on energy centres around the abdomen and by looking at my tongue. Mine was red at the tip indicating heat or agitation in the heart area, which would aggravate my poor sleep.

Many of the points massaged by Sam were tender and sore to the touch, but it was a 'good pain', to feel pressure on them. After each session I felt deeply energised, 'evened out' and much calmer – my sore throat had gone along with the general feeling of anxiety I find it so hard to shake off, and the muscle spasms in my neck and shoulders had faded away.

However, the underlying fatigue and aches did return a few hours later. Perhaps if I had rested after each session the effect would have lasted longer.

My practitioner also advised me that for 24 hours following a session, the movements made to energy in the body can cause a slight flare in symptoms. Interestingly, the week that I reported feeling more weepy than usual was after he had worked on meridians associated with grief.

I was also intrigued to hear of another person, exhausted, who tried shiatsu to see if it would give him more energy. Following treatment, the man went home and slept for two days: not what he'd wanted but what his body actually needed!

A friend of mine was less fortunate and had a big flare up in symptoms the day after treatment with a therapist who had no experience of M.E.. Her advice, if trying Shiatsu, is to see someone who understands how sensitive the illness can make us to any intervention.

