

SHIATSU Healing hands



Pic: Licensed under [CC BY-ND 2.0] from Katrin Werner [flickr]

Shiatsu, meaning 'little finger' in Japanese, is an ancient therapy to heal your mind and body

■ By Samantha Haywood & Andrew Parfitt

SHIATSU IS A conventional Japanese healing therapy. It has the ability to cure specific injuries as well as the general symptoms of poor health. Not only is it a deeply relaxing experience but regular sessions also prevent the building up of stress in day-to-day life.

Background to Shiatsu

The core principle of Shiatsu is the vital energy [*Ki* in Japanese] that flows throughout the body in connected channels called 'meridians'. *Ki* can stop flowing freely owing to many reasons, producing symptoms that can then be healed by Shiatsu. It is based on the underlying philosophy of oriental medicine, like acupuncture.

Your practitioner will use a variety of techniques to improve your energy flow taking into consideration your state of health, symptoms and general energy levels. These techniques may include gentle holding, applying pressure with palms, thumbs, fingers, elbows, knees and feet on the meridians and also more dynamic rotations and stretches when necessary.

With changes in the *Ki*, the symptoms associated with a lack of flow will steadily improve. Shiatsu is a therapy that works on the individual as a complete being—tending to the emotional as well as mental health along with the physical body. A feeling of harmony

and relaxation is experienced by balancing the flow of energy.

What to expect in a session

Each session is approximately an hour long. You usually lie on a futon—a padded mat at ground level, although you can do the session on a chair if you are unable to lie down. The client stays *fully clothed* throughout. At the end of a treatment, you can experience a feeling of increased vitality and you may feel invigorated yet relaxed.

Benefits of Shiatsu

- » Calms mind and body
- » Restores energy balance
- » Relieves tension and stiffness
- » Improves breathing
- » Improves posture
- » Provides for better circulation
- » Enhances wellbeing

How to find a qualified practitioner

The Shiatsu Society holds a public register of qualified practitioners, all of whom have undertaken a minimum of three years training. They are fully insured and abide by our comprehensive Code of Conduct and Ethics. Most reputed spas and hotels will have a certified Shiatsu practitioner.

Proof that it works

The European Shiatsu Federation [ESF] commissioned Professor Long at the University of Leeds to look at the research and documentation of experiences and effects of Shiatsu across Europe. The aim was to provide a platform from which to solidly describe Shiatsu and its benefits. The results showed that:

- » 89 per cent of Shiatsu receivers felt calmer and more relaxed
- » Up to 60 per cent of regular Shiatsu receivers slept better
- » Receivers rated their symptoms as significantly reduced throughout the six-month study
- » 86 per cent said that Shiatsu was effective in treating stress and tension, structural and postural problems, low energy and fatigue
- » They had a reduced use of conventional medicine
- » Overall, Shiatsu receivers adopted a more relaxed, healthier and balanced approach to life.

Is it an alternative to mainstream medicine?

Shiatsu is a complementary therapy and is used alongside mainstream medicine.

Techniques that you can use at home

Although Shiatsu is best received from a qualified practitioner, there are techniques or exercises that can be performed at home.

- » To calm the mind and settle anxiety, place a stone or crystal in your palm and squeeze tightly



Samantha Haywood is manager of the Shiatsu Society (UK).



Andrew Parfitt is Director of the Shiatsu Society. He is a qualified acupuncturist, massage therapist and Thermo-Auricular therapist.

- » for a minute or two, then place it in the other hand and continue alternating the hands. This stimulates the acupressure point *Laogong* or 'Palace of Anxiety' in the centre of the palm. Before a presentation, you can achieve a similar effect by vigorously rolling a pen between the palms.
- » To moisten and brighten the eyes, or clear headaches, gently squeeze either side of the highest point of the nose, [the bridge of your nose] close to the corner of the eye socket.
- » To give yourself extra energy when flagging, stimulate the area on the outside edge of the shin, four of your own fingers below the bottom of the kneecap. This point on the 'Stomach meridian' is called 'Leg three miles' and was traditionally used to give Chinese foot soldiers extra energy at the end of a long march.
- » To improve digestive function, massage your abdomen using



Watsu

Watsu is Shiatsu practised in water and gets its name from the words 'water' and 'Shiatsu'. It was born in 1980, when Harold Dull started applying the Zen principles of Shiatsu to people while they were held in water.

It involves stretching, being held, rocked and moved by an experienced practitioner, in water heated to about 34 degree Celsius. The weight of the body is taken off the vertebrae due to the buoyancy of water, allowing the client to move in ways not possible on land. Clients find it very relaxing because Watsu allows you to let go. It is beneficial especially for pregnant women and those suffering from sore muscles and joints.

WatsuGoa and Watsu Auroville offer treatments as well as teach those interested in learning about watsu. [www.watsugoa.com]

three fingers, starting at the navel and working down to the lowest edge of your tummy, continue in a circle towards the right, across the top and down the left. Repeat this several times on a daily basis. This is part of a system we call *Ampuku*.

- » If you are tired and finding concentration or motivation a problem, try a little *Do-In*. Start by tapping your scalp with your fingertips, imagine heavy raindrops falling upon your head. Rub your face with your hands as if washing it. Then form a loose fist with one hand and tap the opposite shoulder, work along the inner side of your arm down to the palm and back up the outer edge of the arm to the shoulder. Repeat this several times fairly briskly before starting on the opposite side.