



## **All About Massage Therapy**

For a list of references and sources used in creating this Web page, click [here](#).

### **What Is Massage Therapy?**

Massage therapy is recognized as one of the oldest methods of healing, with references in medical texts nearly 4,000 years old. In fact, Hippocrates, known as the "father of medicine," referenced massage when he wrote, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.: "The physician must be acquainted with many things, and assuredly with *rubbing*."

Now days, in addition to "rubbing," massage therapy, often referred to as bodywork or somatic therapy, refers to the application of various techniques to the muscular structure and soft tissues of the body that include applying fixed or movable pressure, holding, vibration, rocking, friction, kneading and compression using primarily the hands, although massage therapists do use other areas of the body, such as the forearms, elbows or feet. All of the techniques are used for the benefit of the musculoskeletal, circulatory-lymphatic, nervous, and other systems of the body. In fact, massage therapy positively influences the overall health and well-being of the client:

### **Physical and Mental Benefits**

- relaxes the whole body
- loosens tight muscles
- relieves tired and aching muscles
- increases flexibility and range of motion
- diminishes chronic pain
- calms the nervous system
- lowers blood pressure
- lowers heart rate
- enhances skin tone

- assists in recovery from injuries and illness
- strengthens the immune system
- reduces tension headaches
- reduces mental stress
- improves concentration
- promotes restful sleep
- aids in mental relaxation

Currently, there are well over 100,000 massage therapists practicing in the United States alone. Training requirements vary from state to state, although an increasing number of schools and states recommend massage therapy programs of at least 500 hours training. As of March 2004, 33 states and the District of Columbia have official massage licensing regulations, and other states are pending.

Learn more about specific massage techniques and related terms by clicking on the links below (*Note: New techniques and terms are added on a continuing basis.*):

- [Acupressure](#)
- [Acupuncture](#)
- [Alexander Technique](#)
- [Animal Massage](#)
- [Aromatherapy](#)
- [Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy](#)
- [Asian Bodywork](#)
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- [Traditonal Chinese Medicine](#)
- [Trager Approach](#)
- [Trigger Point Therapy](#)
- [Tuina](#)
- [Visceral Manipulation](#)
- [Watsu](#)
- [Zero Balancing](#)

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## **Acupressure**

Acupressure is an ancient form of healing believed by some to be even older than acupuncture. It involves the use of the fingers (and in some cases, the toes) to press key points on the surface of the skin to stimulate the body's natural ability to heal itself. Pressing on these points relieves muscle tension, which promotes the circulation of blood and qi (pronounced "chee") -- the vital energy or "life force" -- to aid in the healing process.

Acupressure and acupuncture are somewhat similar. Acupressure is sometimes referred to as "needleless acupuncture," because both forms of healing use the same points to achieve the desired results. The main difference is that an acupuncturist stimulates points by inserting needles, whereas an acupressurist stimulates the same points using finger pressure.

Stimulating specific points on the body can trigger the release of endorphins (chemicals produced by the body that relieve pain). When endorphins are released, pain is blocked, and the flow of blood and oxygen to the affected area is increased. This causes the muscles to relax and promotes healing. In acupressure, as with most traditional Chinese medicine concepts, local symptoms are considered an expression of the whole body's condition.

When performed correctly, acupressure increases circulation, reduces tension and enables the body to relax. Reducing tension, in turn, strengthens the immune system and promotes wellness. However, applying acupressure too abruptly, or using too much force during treatment, can lead to bruising and discomfort. Great care should be used when applying pressure to points on or near the abdomen, groin, armpits or throat. Special care should be when treating pregnant women or those with recently-formed scars, burns, infections or skin lesions.

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## **Acupuncture**

Acupuncture is one of the oldest, most commonly used systems of healing in the world. Originating in China some 3,500 years ago, only in the last three decades has it become popular in the United States.

Traditional Chinese medicine asserts that there are as many as 2,000 acupuncture points on the human body,

which are connected by 20 pathways (12 main, 8 secondary) called meridians. These meridians conduct energy, or *qi* (pronounced "chee"), between the surface of the body and its internal organs. Each point has a different effect on the *qi* that passes through it. *Qi* is believed to help regulate balance in the body. It is influenced by the opposing forces of yin and yang, which represent positive and negative energy and forces in the universe and human body. Acupuncture is believed to keep the balance between yin and yang, thus allowing for the normal flow of *qi* throughout the body and restoring health to the mind and body.

Several theories have been presented as to exactly how acupuncture works. One theory suggests that pain impulses are blocked from reaching the spinal cord or brain at various "gates" to these areas. Since a majority of acupuncture points are either connected to (or are located near) neural structures, this suggests that acupuncture stimulates the nervous system. Another theory suggests that acupuncture stimulates the body to produce narcotic-like substances called endorphins, which reduce pain. Other studies have found that other pain-relieving substances called opioids may be released into the body during acupuncture treatment.

Unlike hypodermic needles, acupuncture needles are solid and hair-thin, and they are not designed to cut the skin. They are also inserted to much more shallow levels than hypodermic needles, generally no more than a half-inch to an inch depending on the type of treatment being delivered. While each person experiences acupuncture differently, most people feel only a minimal amount of pain as the needles are inserted. Some people reportedly feel a sensation of excitement, while others feel relaxed. If you experience significant pain from the needles, it may be a sign that the procedure is being done improperly.

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## **Alexander Technique**

According to Alexander Technique International, the Alexander Technique "is a means of consciously attending to how one performs any given activity, consciously inhibiting one's habitual way of doing that activity, and then consciously directing oneself in a more coordinated way."\*

Developed by Australian performer F.M. Alexander in the late 19th Century, the Alexander Technique is unlike massage or bodywork that is used to treat specific conditions, illnesses or ailments; rather, it is a form of education designed to improve one's self-observation in relation to movement.

Instructors of the Alexander Technique, use noninvasive hands-on methods to assess movement, then educate students on how to become more aware of their movement and enact specific changes in order to reduce physical stress on the body and/or improve performance.

\* For reference information, [click here](#).

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## **Animal Massage**

Like humans, animals are susceptible to injury, debilitating disease and stress, and can benefit from massage. Massage therapists have built entire practices around horses ([Equine massage](#)), dogs and cats; some practitioners even work with birds and domesticated reptiles.

In addition to making house calls, therapists that work with animals work in veterinary offices, and with police departments, animal shelters and breeders. Working animals -- such as horses, and police and show dogs -- can benefit from massage on a regular basis; however, massage is also beneficial for house pets, and can ease arthritis and muscle pain, and increase flexibility and range of motion. Other benefits include detoxification, increased mobility, improved performance and decreased anxiety.

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## **Aromatherapy**

Many essential oils that are derived from plants, herbs, flowers, and roots have beneficial therapeutic qualities. Aromatherapy involves the "burning" of essential oils to elicit a desired effect; for example, lavender is known to induce calmness and relaxation. When combined with bodywork, aromatherapy can enrich the massage experience immensely. A few drops of essential oil can be added to massage cream or oil and applied to the skin. Professionally trained aromatherapists also blend oils to treat specific conditions. Only experienced professionals and/or those knowledgeable in the properties of aromatherapy should attempt to blend oils or utilize them in practice, as some oil combinations can be toxic, while others can burn the skin.

For more detailed information about aromatherapy, visit the **Aromatherapy Center** at [www.massagetoday.com/topics/aromatherapy.php](http://www.massagetoday.com/topics/aromatherapy.php).

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## **Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy,**

Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy was developed in 1995 by massage therapist Ruthie Hardee. Ashiatsu comes from the Japanese words *ashi* (foot) and *atsu* (pressure), and is an ancient form of bodywork associated with traditional shiatsu and some dynamics of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM).

There are distinct differences between Ashiatsu and Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy. Clients lie on massage tables, while practitioners perform Swedish massage with their feet by utilizing two overhead stationary bars to maintain balance and control.

Because therapists can also perform deep-tissue work using Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy, this technique can help extend a therapist's career by alleviating hand and extremity pain associated with performing more demanding forms of bodywork.

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## **Asian Bodywork**

Asian bodywork is a general term that describes multiple forms of bodywork that originated from Asian countries and/or cultures, including acupressure, *chi nei tsang*, Five-Element Shiatsu, integrative eclectic shiatsu, Japanese shiatsu, medical *qigong*, shiatsu, Thai massage, tuina, zen shiatsu and others.

For more information on Asian Bodywork, visit [www.massagetoday.com/selectarticles/asian1.php](http://www.massagetoday.com/selectarticles/asian1.php).

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## **Ayurvedic Massage**

Ayurveda is a practice that originated in India several thousand years ago. The practice involves balancing the three life energy forces: *vata*, *pitta*, and *kapha*. *Vata* is the energy of movement; *pitta*, the energy of digestion; and *kapha* is the energy of structure. These energy forms are made up of the components and combinations of the five great elements: Space, Fire, Water, Air and Earth.

Ayurvedic massage incorporates the knowledge of ayurveda and uses warm oils and herbs along the specific energy points to help restore balance to the body. Massage strokes, oils and herbs are selected based on a client's specific needs; hence, each treatment is highly customized. Benefits of ayurvedic massage include vitality, stress reduction, and relaxation. Proponents of ayurveda also report a renewed sense of spiritual connection and inner peace.

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## **Bonnie Prudden Myotherapy®**

Developed in 1976 by physical fitness expert Bonnie Prudden, this technique seeks to eliminate pain by applying steady pressure to trigger points for several seconds using the fingers, knuckles, and elbows, and then applying specific stretching and exercise techniques to further facilitate recovery. Among other benefits, this technique helps alleviate pain, relax muscles, and improve circulation and flexibility.

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## **Bowen Technique**

The Bowen technique, as its name suggests, was developed over 30 years ago by Thomas Bowen. It involves the application of light touch and "rolling" strokes using the thumbs and fingers. This technique works to manipulate the soft tissues to aid in circulation, lymph drainage, and release energy blockages, among other things.

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## **Breema**

Breema is unusual because it is designed with both the client and practitioner in mind. Clients lie on a floor mat and remain fully clothed while the practitioner applies gentle stretching and holding techniques to support the client's vitality, inner peace and well being.

For more on Breema, read Dave Pratt's article "Stay in Touch With...Breema" in the May issue of *Massage Today* at [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/05/05.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/05/05.html).

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## **Chair Massage**

Chair massage, also known as seated massage, is fast becoming one of the most popular ways in which to practice. Generally, chair massage is administered onsite at various locations, including health fairs, airports, shopping malls and in corporate settings. Clients remain fully clothed and treatments generally last from 15-30 minutes. Chair massage is usually limited to the back, neck and arms.

For more on Chair Massage, read Lee Chaffee's article "Stuck in Seated Positioning with Chair Massage?" in the August issue of *Massage Today* at [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/08/14.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/08/14.html).

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## **Color Therapy**

Color therapy is a form of energy work based on the theory that light deprivation leads to dysfunction in the body. Since each color has its own frequency and vibration, specific colors are used to treat designated parts of the body. The body, in turn, responds to the vibrational pattern of the color and works to correct the dysfunction.

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## **Connective Tissue Massage**

Connective tissue massage is similar to myofascial release in that it involves working with the body's fascia, or soft tissue, to relieve pain, tightness, and discomfort. The idea behind connective tissue massage is that restriction in one area of the body negatively affects other areas of the body. Practitioners of this technique "hook" their fingers into the connective tissue and utilize pulling strokes to lengthen the area. Benefits include pain reduction, tension relief, improved mobility and stress reduction. See also Soft-tissue massage.

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## **CranioSacral Therapy (CST)**

CranioSacral Therapy was developed over 20 years ago by Dr. John Upledger, while he served as a researcher and professor at Michigan State University. This gentle, hands-on technique involves the craniosacral system -- a system of the body composed of membranes and cerebrospinal fluid that surrounds the brain and spinal cord. Practitioners utilize CST to loosen and release restrictions or "blockages" in the body that can contribute to pain and dysfunction; removing such blockages improves the functioning of the central nervous system and body as a whole.

CST is effective at treating a number of problems, including pain, headaches, central nervous system disorders, chronic fatigue syndrome, stress, tension and more. Proponents of CST also claim that it aids in improving mental clarity and emotional well-being.

For more information on this technique, visit [www.massagetoday.com/selectarticles/cst.php](http://www.massagetoday.com/selectarticles/cst.php).

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## **Cupping**

Massage cupping has been used in traditional Chinese medicine practices for several thousand years. Practitioners light an alcohol-soaked cotton ball with a match and insert the lit portion into a bulb-like glass "cup" in order to create a vacuum. The cup is then placed in a stationary position upon the body or moved using gliding strokes, depending on the client's needs. Massage cupping is ideal for performing deep-tissue massage and helps to drain toxins, loosen adhesions, facilitate blood flow, and stimulate the body.

For more information on massage cupping, read Anita Shannon's article, "Massage Cupping for Health Care Professionals," in the February 2004 issue of *Massage Today* at [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/02/04.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/02/04.html).

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## **Deep-Tissue Massage**

Deep-tissue massage utilizes slow strokes, direct pressure or friction applied across the grain of the muscles with the fingers, thumbs or elbows. Deep-tissue massage works deeply into the muscles and connective

tissue to release chronic aches and pains; its purpose is to reach the fascia beneath the surface muscles.

Practitioners must have a thorough understanding of the human body and have been trained to administer deep-tissue massage, as injury can occur if the technique is not performed properly. This technique is useful in treating chronic pain, inflammation and injury.

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## **Equine Massage**

This term refers to the practice of massage therapy on horses. Benefits include increased flexibility, injury prevention, pain relief, and improved performance, among others. (See [animal massage](#)).

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## **Feldenkrais**

The Feldenkrais Method®, named for its founder, Moshe Feldenkrais, DSc, is a form of education related to body movement. Unlike massage, which is used to treat specific conditions, Feldenkrais is based on the notion that replacing bad movement habits (usually learned early in life) with good ones through increased self-awareness, leads to improvements in flexibility, coordination, range of motion, relaxation, and a range of other things.

Instructors teach students in groups, known as "awareness through movement" classes or in private settings, called "functional integration" sessions, and use gentle hands-on or verbal communication to draw attention to positive movement patterns.

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## **Five-Element Shiatsu**

In traditional [shiatsu](#), practitioners apply pressure to specific points on the body to help release energy imbalances. Five-element shiatsu incorporates the five-element theory of [traditional Chinese medicine](#) in which the meridians on the body correspond to specific elements -- Wood, Earth, Fire, Water, and Metal -- and are the foundation for the balance of ying and yang. When one or more of these elements is out of

balance, sickness and/or emotional imbalance can occur. Practitioners of five-element shiatsu apply pressure along the meridians in order to release energy blockages and help restore balance to the body and enhance the body's ability to heal itself.

For more information on this and other forms of Asian Bodywork, visit [www.massagetoday.com/selectarticles/asian.php](http://www.massagetoday.com/selectarticles/asian.php).

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## **Geriatric Massage**

Geriatric massage involves treating the elderly, often in resident-care facilities, and addressing their needs related to aging, depression and illness. Geriatric massage is usually shorter in duration, and involves the application of gentle techniques to facilitate pain relief, relaxation, and an overall feeling of wellness.

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## **Hellerwork**

Hellerwork is concerned with emphasizing the body's structural balance and realignment through deep-tissue work and movement therapy techniques. Hellerwork is administered over the course of 11 sessions, each lasting 90 minutes. Practitioners spend one hour massaging clients and 30 minutes in movement education. During the treatment, practitioners help clients reach an elevated state of self-awareness by using verbal communication. Hellerwork is useful in treating chronic stress and tension, as well as aiding in relaxation and extended range of motion.

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## **Hydrotherapy**

- Hydrotherapy involves the use of water in all its forms (internally and externally) to assist in the healing process. These water therapies can include the use of a whirlpool, the application of ice or heat packs, colonic irrigation, steambaths, body wraps and more. Hydrotherapy is commonly practiced in conjunction with other spa treatments.

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## **Infant Massage**

Infant massage has proved beneficial for both infants and their families on a number of levels. It is used regularly in hospital neonatal units and has been linked with helping premature infants gain weight. Infant massage has been shown to help relieve colic, induce sleep, promote relaxation, improve sensory integration, and enhance neurological development, among other things; moreover, the practice of massage helps build the bond between babies and their parents.

For more information, read Maria Mathias' article, "Infant Massage: Everyone Benefits," in the November 2003 issue of *Massage Today* at [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2003/11/05.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2003/11/05.html), or check out the interview with Patricia Cadolino, facilitator of the nurturing touch program in the neonatal intensive care unit at Stony Brook University Hospital on Long Island, New York, in the March 2004 issue ([www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/03/03.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/03/03.html)).

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## **Iridology**

Iridology is the study and analysis of the iris, or the colored part of the eye, which practitioners believe can reveal information about a person's overall health and/or tendencies toward disease. Iridology is not used to diagnose; however, practitioners utilize the technique to better determine a client's health, lifestyle and nutritional needs. Iridology is used to complement other natural therapies, including massage, acupuncture and traditional Chinese medicine, homeopathy, naturopathy, and energy work, to name a few.

To read more about iridology, check out Karen E. Jones' article, "Iridology and Massage," in the October 2003 issue of *Massage Today* at [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2003/10/05.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2003/10/05.html).

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## **Lomi Lomi**

Lomi Lomi literally translated means "rub." It is a form of Hawaiian bodywork that developed out of the Hawaiian philosophy of Huna; that is, a belief in harmony and balance in all areas of physical and emotional

health. Practitioners work intuitively with clients using their hands, elbows, and forearms to apply long, gliding strokes, rhythmic movements, and pressure. This technique is very nurturing; practitioners acknowledge that love and a pure heart is important to the process, and sometimes the session will begin with a chant or prayer. Sometimes more than one practitioner will work on different parts of a client at the same time to facilitate a feeling of wholeness -- a main component of the practice.

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## **Lymph Drainage Therapy (LDT)**

Developed by French physician Bruno Chikly, this technique involves the application of light, rhythmic strokes to help alleviate various conditions related to the body's lymph system. Among other things, the lymph system is responsible for flushing out toxins and draining fluid, which supports a healthy immune system. When lymph circulation stagnates, however, fluid can build up and cause physical problems, such as inflammation, edemas and neuropathies.

LDT enables practitioners to restore proper lymph flow by using a "mapping" system to assess congested areas in the body, then apply gentle, pressure using the fingers and hands on these areas to reactivate proper circulation. See also [Manual Lymph Drainage](#).

Read Bruno Chikly's article, "Massage Therapists and Breast Care: Easing the Controversy," in the January 2004 issue of *Massage Today* at [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/01/03.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/01/03.html).

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## **Lypossage**

Lypossage combines several massage modalities for the purpose of enhancing skin tone and firmness, and to combat the effects of cellulite. Lypossage is often the preferred method of treating cellulite, since it provides a noninvasive alternative to expensive cosmetic surgery. Practitioners of lypossage usually emphasize the importance of diet and exercise, as well.

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## **Manual Lymph Drainage (Vodder Technique)**

Manual Lymph Drainage was developed in the 1930s by Danish physical therapists, Emil and Estrid Vodder. The technique consists of light, rhythmic strokes to aid lymph flow and proper fluid circulation, and help stimulate the lymph vessels to ultimately drain toxic fluids from the body. See also [Lymph Drainage Therapy](#).

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## **Massotherapy**

Massotherapy involves working primarily with the muscles. Practitioners of massotherapy have a background in science, but often incorporate other modalities into their treatments when working with the muscle groups. Benefits of massotherapy include improved circulation and blood flow, as well as pain management.

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## **Medical Massage**

Practitioners of medical massage have a strong background in pathology, disease, illness and injury, and the contraindications of specific massage techniques related to various medical conditions. Medical massage therapists frequently work under the direction of or at the request of physicians. (See [orthopedic massage](#).)

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## **Myofascial Release (MFR)**

Myofascial release deals with the fascia, or connective tissue, of the body. The fascia is interconnected to every other part of the body, and actually helps to support the body's very structure, including the musculoskeletal system. When injury, inflammation, or physical or emotional trauma occurs, the fascia can become tight and cause pain and/or restricted range of motion. Myofascial release -- as its name suggests -- aims to release the fascia and return it to a state of normalcy by applying gentle pressure to the restricted areas. MFR can help with a number of conditions, including chronic pain, headaches, and stress-related illnesses. See also [Soft-tissue massage](#), [connective tissue massage](#).

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## **Neuromuscular Therapy (NMT)**

NMT is massage applied to specific muscles, often used to increase blood flow, release knots of muscle tension, or release pain/pressure on nerves. This therapy is also known as trigger-point therapy in that concentrated finger pressure is applied to "trigger points" to alleviate muscular pain.

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## **Orthopedic Massage**

Orthopedic massage combines several massage and medical massage techniques to treat pain and soft-tissue injury. It focuses heavily on injury assessment and rehabilitation, emphasizing the importance of selecting the appropriate modality to treat the injury. Orthopedic massage is often used in conjunction with sports massage protocols.

For more information on orthopedic massage, read James Waslaski's articles: "Orthopedic Massage vs. Medical Massage: Are We Using the Correct Terminology?" (Feb. 2004, [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/02/03.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/02/03.html)) and "Defining Medical Massage" (June 2004, [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/06/03.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/06/03.html)).

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## **Polarity Therapy**

According to the American Polarity Therapy Association, "Polarity therapy is a comprehensive health system involving energy-based bodywork, diet, exercise and self-awareness. It works with the Human Energy Field, electromagnetic patterns expressed in mental, emotional and physical experience. In Polarity Therapy, health is viewed as a reflection of the condition of the energy field, and therapeutic methods are designed to balance the field for health benefit."\* The technique's pioneer, Dr. Randolph Stone, a strong proponent of the healing powers of energy, utilized polarity therapy in his practice until retiring at the age of 84 in 1974.

\* For reference information, [click here](#).

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## **Prenatal Massage**

Prenatal, or pregnancy, massage uses gentle techniques to help alleviate some of the ailments associated with pregnancy, including lower back, neck and shoulder pain; fatigue; joint tenderness; and stretch marks. Prenatal massage can help improve circulation, promote stress reduction and relaxation, and much more. Practitioners should be well-trained in prenatal massage in order to deliver safe and effective care, and patients should check with their doctors prior to receiving treatment.

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## ***Qi* (Pronounced "Chee")**

Also *chi*, *ka* and *ji*. The basis of [traditional Chinese medicine](#) revolves around *qi*, which is considered a vital force or energy responsible for controlling the workings of the human mind and body. *Qi* flows through the body via channels, or pathways, which are called meridians. There are a total of 20 meridians: 12 primary meridians, which correspond to specific organs, organ systems or functions, and eight secondary meridians. Imbalances in the flow of *qi* cause illness and correction of this flow restores the body to balance. (See [acupuncture](#), [acupressure](#), [Asian bodywork](#), [shiatsu](#), [five-element shiatsu](#)).

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## **Reflexology**

This technique is based on a system of points on the hands, feet and ears that correspond, or "reflex," to other areas of the body. Similar in theory to [acupressure](#), reflexologists believe that applying appropriate pressure to these points stimulates the flow of energy, thus helping to relieve pain or blockages throughout the entire body. A very pleasurable form of bodywork, reflexology is also used to ease stress and promote relaxation.

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## **Reiki**

While not strictly under the auspices of massage, Reiki (pronounced "ray-key") is often practiced in conjunction with bodywork. The word Reiki comes from two Japanese words - *rei*, meaning higher power or universal force, and *ki*, meaning life energy. Loosely translated, Reiki means universal or spiritually-guided life-force energy.

Practiced for thousands of years throughout Japan, China, Tibet and other Asian nations, Reiki was "rediscovered" in the late 19th century by Dr. Mikao Usui, a Buddhist monk and educator, who used the therapy to heal the sick. Today, Reiki is used as a method of healing illness and reducing stress through light touch or, more commonly, by placing the hands near or above the body in specific positions or patterns. Through these positions, a Reiki practitioner can correct energetic imbalances in the body by removing toxic energy, improving health and restoring a person's energy levels.

As of late, Reiki has received more public attention by way of research studies. Check out the article, "Federally funded Reiki Study Underway in Washington," in the February 2004 issue of *Massage Today* at [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/02/06.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/02/06.html).

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## **Rolfing® (Structural Integration)**

Developed by Ida P. Rolf in the 1940s, Structural Integration, or Rolfing, works to correct imbalances in body caused by natural gravitational forces. This technique utilizes deep pressure to help lengthen and relieve built up tension in the body's connective tissues. Benefits of this technique include improved balance, posture, and range of motion; increased energy; stress reduction; and alleviation of pain and discomfort.

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## **Rosen Method**

This technique utilizes a combination of light touch, breathing exercises, relaxation techniques and verbal communication to work in helping clients to connect to themselves emotionally in order to reduce tension and stress throughout the body.

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## **Shiatsu**

Shiatsu is a Japanese form of massage therapy similar to acupressure; in fact, the word shiatsu literally means "finger pressure." As with acupressure, the concepts of shiatsu hold that it can promote health and facilitate healing by correcting energy imbalances in the body. These imbalances are corrected by applying pressure to specific points along channels in the body known as meridians. While there is no exact date as to when shiatsu originated, the technique is believed to be hundreds, if not thousands, of years old.

Shiatsu is usually delivered with the thumbs. However, some practitioners will use their fingers, palms, elbows -- and even feet -- to achieve the desired effect. Typically, a shiatsu practitioner will apply pressure not just to a few points on the body. The goal here is twofold: to release energy (*qi* in Chinese, *ki* in Japanese - pronounced "chee") in areas where it may be blocked or stagnating, and to bring energy back to areas that are depleted.

In addition to applying pressure, shiatsu practitioners may manipulate the soft tissue over and around meridians, and perform passive and active stretching exercises as part of treatment. Scientifically speaking, shiatsu is an excellent form of pain relief. Research has shown that applying extensive pressure initiates the release of endorphins, natural pain-killing substances produced by the body. Shiatsu may also lower the levels of adrenaline and other stress hormones, producing a relaxing effect.

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## **Soft-Tissue Massage**

Soft-tissue massage is a generic term for any modality that is used to treat the soft tissues in the body, including muscle, fascia, and scar tissue. Common modalities used include Swedish, myofascial release, deep-tissue massage, trigger-point therapy, connective tissue massage.

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## Spa Treatments

This term refers to several types of treatments generally performed in resort and day spas. Some of these include manicures and pedicures, mud wraps, body scrubs, sea salt scrubs, paraffin treatments, hydrotherapy treatments, scalp treatments, facials, and herbal and seaweed body wraps.

For more spa-related articles, visit [www.massagetoday.com/selectarticles/spa.php](http://www.massagetoday.com/selectarticles/spa.php).

**TOP**

## Sports Massage

Sports massage therapies are both preventative and therapeutic, and used for athletes during warm ups, training and competition to treat and/or aid in the prevention of injuries; help improve flexibility, range of motion, and performance; and aid in mental clarity. Virtually every professional sports team employs professional sports massage therapists, and are often privately employed by professional athletes.

Read *Massage Today's* sports massage columnist Michael McGillicuddy's column [here](#).

**TOP**

## Swedish Massage

Generally regarded as the most common form of massage, Swedish massage involves a combination of five basic strokes and concentrates on the muscles and connective tissues of the body for improved circulation, relaxation, pain relief, and overall health maintenance and well-being. Swedish massage is also one of the less demanding techniques for massage therapists to practice as it usually does not involve deep-tissue work.

**TOP**

## Thai Massage

Practiced in Thailand for over 2,000 years, Thai massage -- also known as yoga massage, Thai yoga massage and ancient massage -- works to clear energy blockages and restore balance and harmony to the body. The practice combines typical Westernized massage therapy practices, including myofascial release and trigger point therapy, with light stretching similar to that of yoga. It has even earned the name "lazy

man's yoga." Like yoga, Thai massage helps to strengthen the body and increase flexibility, while allowing the client to benefit from the relaxation and healing properties of massage.

Rather than using a massage table, Thai massage is administered to fully clothed clients on floor mats. Practitioners use their own body weight to position clients into yoga-like forms while instructing clients on proper breathing for maximum results.

For more information, read the article, "Relax the Thai Way," at [www.massagetoday.com/onlinearticles/wilkowski.php](http://www.massagetoday.com/onlinearticles/wilkowski.php)

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## **Thalassotherapy**

This hydrotherapy treatment is often used in day spas and wellness clinics. It utilizes seawater and sea water products for their minerals and healing properties. Thalassotherapy treatments can involve body wraps, or, more commonly, heated seawater baths. Benefits include relaxation, increased circulation, and treatment of pain and injury.

**TOP**

## **Therapeutic Touch (TT)**

Therapeutic Touch is a form of bodywork practiced primarily in the nursing profession. Using light touch, practitioners work with a clients energy to help restore balance, emotional clarity, and promote relaxation and healing.

**TOP**

## **Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)**

Traditional Chinese medicine is one of the oldest continuous systems of medicine in history, with recorded instances dating as far back as two thousand years before the birth of Christ. This is in sharp contrast to American or Western forms of health care, which have been in existence for a much shorter time span.

Traditional Chinese medicine is based, at least in part, on the Daoist belief that we live in a universe in which everything is interconnected. What happens to one part of the body affects every other part of the body. The mind and body are not viewed separately, but as part of an energetic system. Similarly, organs and organ systems are viewed as interconnected structures that work together to keep the body functioning.

Many of the concepts emphasized in traditional Chinese medicine have no true counterpart in Western medicine. One of these concepts is *qi* (pronounced "chee"), which is considered a vital force or energy responsible for controlling the workings of the human mind and body. *Qi* flows through the body via channels, or pathways, which are called meridians. There are a total of 20 meridians: 12 primary meridians, which correspond to specific organs, organ systems or functions, and eight secondary meridians. Imbalances in the flow of *qi* cause illness; correction of this flow restores the body to balance.

Traditional Chinese medicine encompasses several methods designed to help patients achieve and maintain health. Along with acupuncture, TCM incorporates adjunctive techniques such as acupressure, tuina, herbal medicine, diet and lifestyle, meditation, and other practices.

For more information on TCM, visit [www.acupuncturetoday.com/abc/](http://www.acupuncturetoday.com/abc/)

**TOP**

## **Trager Approach®**

The Trager Approach relies on gentle, rhythmic rocking and stretching techniques to promote easy and free movement and sensation throughout the body. Clients wear loose-fitting clothing and lay on a table in a warm treatment room. Sessions can last from either one hour to an hour and a half.

Following the session, practitioners provide clients with information on "Mentastics," or mental gymnastics, and "recall". Mentastics and recall help the client recreate the experiences they felt during the actual Trager session to help induce the positive feelings and states of relaxation associated with the session. The effects of the Trager Approach are cumulative and improve over time; hence, clients are encouraged to engage in several sessions to reap its full benefits.

**TOP**

## **Trigger-Point Therapy**

Trigger points are areas of soft tissue in the body characterized by local pain, tightness, and tenderness. Often trigger points develop because of referred pain, or pain from another source that has manifested itself in a trigger point. Trigger points rarely refer pain to other areas.

Trigger-point therapy seeks first to identify trigger points, then apply steady, appropriate pressure to the point to "release" it. This is usually followed by massage to the surrounding area to help treat the cause of the trigger point. Clients are encouraged to drink a lot of water following a trigger-point therapy session to flush out any toxins released when the trigger point is released.

**TOP**

## **Tuina**

Tuina (pronounced "twee nah") is a form of Asian bodywork that has been used in China for centuries. A combination of massage, acupressure and other forms of body manipulation, tuina works by applying pressure to acupoints, meridians and groups of muscles or nerves to remove blockages that prevent the free flow of qi (pronounced "chee"). Removing these blockages restores the balance of qi in the body, leading to improved health and vitality.

Tuina is best suited for alleviating chronic pain, musculoskeletal conditions and stress-related disorders that affect the digestive and/or respiratory systems. Among the ailments tuina treats best are neck pain, shoulder pain, back pain, sciatica and tennis elbow. However, because tuina is designed to improve and restore the flow of qi, treatment often ends up causing improvements to the whole body, not just a specific area.

There is anecdotal evidence that headaches, constipation, premenstrual symptoms and some emotional problems may also be effectively treated through tuina. Because it tends to be more specific and intense than other types of bodywork, tuina may not necessarily be used to sedate or relax a patient. The type of massage delivered by a tuina practitioner can be quite vigorous; in fact, some people may feel sore after their first session. Some patients may also experience feelings of sleepiness or euphoria. As with all forms of care, there are certain instances in which tuina should not be performed. Patients with osteoporosis or conditions involving fractures, for instance, should not receive tuina. Neither should patients with infectious diseases, skin problems or open wounds.

**TOP**

## **Visceral Manipulation**

Visceral Manipulation seeks to correct pain and dysfunction caused by imbalance between the organs and structures of the body.

According to the Upledger Institute, "Visceral Manipulation (VM) is a gentle hands-on therapy that works through the body's visceral system (the heart, liver, intestines and other internal organs) to locate and alleviate abnormal points of tension throughout the body. VM employs specifically placed manual forces that work to encourage the normal mobility, tone and motion of the viscera and their connective tissues. Trained practitioners use the rhythmic motions of the visceral system to evaluate how abnormal forces interplay, overlap and affect the normal body forces at work. These gentle manipulations can potentially improve the functioning of individual organs, the systems the organs function within, and the structural integrity of the entire body." \*

\*For reference information, [click here](#).

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## **Watsu**

Watsu is a hydrotherapy treatment quickly gaining popularity all over the world. Watsu, which combines the words **water** and **shiatsu**, is literally shiatsu performed on clients who float in warm water. The practitioner carefully holds the client and applies gentle stretching and shiatsu-like massage techniques along the back, neck, shoulders, and limbs. This therapy is useful for a number of reasons: The warm water soothes muscles and promotes relaxation; the feeling of weightlessness promotes free movement; and benefits include pain relief, stress reduction and deep relaxation. Watsu also promotes self-reflection, connection and trust.

**TOP**

## **Zero Balancing (ZB)**

Zero Balancing is concerned with "bone energy," or the energy of the skeletal system. The practice seeks to work with both the body's energy and physical structure to correct imbalance, restore vitality, and aid in stress relief and pain reduction. ZB work is performed on fully-clothed clients, and sessions usually last about 30-45 minutes.

For more on Zero Balancing, read the article "Zero Balancing: Touching the Spirit Through Energy and Structure," at [www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/08/15.html](http://www.massagetoday.com/archives/2004/08/15.html)

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