

What is Shiatsu?

Shiatsu re-energises weakness and relaxes tension

The Japanese word for Shiatsu translates as shi - finger and atsu – pressure; Shiatsu, finger or thumb pressure. It is an evolving form of bodywork, incorporating influences from both Oriental Medicine and Western physical therapies. Shiatsu uses a combination of pressure on specific points, stretching, and manipulation of joints to help re-energise weak areas, relax tension and help the body to work harmoniously. It is usually done with the client clothed, and is based on the ancient theories of yin and yang. As you can see, Shiatsu is more than finger pressure. It can also incorporate palm healing, the use of elbows, knees and feet, as well as off-the-body work (see 'healing').

Supports the body's capacity to balance itself

Oriental medicine has developed profound techniques for assessing and strengthening a range of self-balancing systems in the body, which are called Ki in Japanese. At present, we don't know how it works, but recent academic research shows that it does. The nature of Ki is the subject of active research by scientists.

The basic idea behind Shiatsu is to help the body to adjust itself by helping the Ki to function. Many symptoms caused by stress and muscular conflict can be relieved immediately, and chronic problems caused by trauma or habit, can often resolve themselves over time with the wide range of skills that a Shiatsu practitioner is trained in including exercise, diet and counselling skills. Join me, if you will, in a very simple exercise to feel what Ki is:

Shiatsu for you

You can do Shiatsu for yourself and you can also sit or lie down and have someone else work with you. (If you haven't ever tried please take advantage of our free lunch time sessions today.)

Sometimes you receive passively, relaxing and trusting another person to give you a session; and at other times you can actively participate in the therapeutic process, and be taught exercises and given dietary advice. A session usually lasts an hour, during which the practitioner will

- take a case history
- give information about Shiatsu
- ask the client what she/he is hoping to achieve during the sessions
- do the bodywork
- and follow up with feedback, advice and more listening

Shiatsu involves a variety of diagnostic tools, mostly touch-based, but also involving Oriental visual, aural, olfactory and verbal methods. We do not attempt to make any medical diagnosis, and will explain this clearly to our clients.

Shiatsu is holistic

Shiatsu, as we practice in Britain and Europe today, has both a distinctly spiritual aspect to it, and a philosophical basis; and these aspects support the people we teach and treat. Our listening skills and the quality of our touch, through mindful awareness of what we do, makes a Shiatsu session a holistic experience. We address our clients' needs in physical, mental, emotional and spiritual ways. The account of the research that Dr. Zoë Pirie PhD carried out, includes personal journals from the participants detailing the effect that Shiatsu had on their lives, and feedback from the GPs involved. They write about practical advice:

"I was having problems sleeping and she (Zoë) gave me some advice about cutting caffeine out and going on decaffeinated tea to be able to rest.
Client"

"I have used lots of the techniques that she showed me to help me relax. I've got a bad back and when the pain gets really bad, I get really uptight. There's pressure points she showed me and deep breathing and it's really beneficial"
Client;

right through to psychological support. Two out of the five clients, who had been diagnosed by their GPs as having long-term clinical depression, came off their anti-depressants (with full involvement of the GPs) after just 10 sessions (8 were practical and 2 were interviews).

"Certainly with Sara, over the years she's made really good progress but it was steady, slow, steady, slow, and Shiatsu seemed to do real good...moved her forwards and off tablets" GP.

- We are trained to be non-judgmental, and although Shiatsu is associated with Taoism and Zen Buddhism, religion is not part of our approach. This means that people can get in touch with their morals and values, and do very often articulate their relationship to the more spiritual aspects of their lives without feeling that they should conform to any particular set of beliefs .

Where does it come from?

Shiatsu is a form of physical therapy which originated in Japan but since the 1970's has developed internationally. It is now widely used throughout the world.

Shiatsu is about touch and touch is something basic – many animals groom each other and we humans need it to live and thrive – indeed babies who are fed and kept clean will die if there is no-one to touch them.

The 13th century historian Salimbene described an experiment made by the German Emperor Frederick II, who wanted to know what language children would speak if raised without hearing any words at all. Babies were taken from their mothers and raised in isolation. The result was that they all died. Salimbene wrote in 1248, "They could not live without petting (use gesture to imply this means touch)." copyright © Judy Rigby The Importance of Touch Complementary Healthcare Information Service – UK

This form of touch was named Shiatsu just under 100 years ago in 1925 in Japan, but is closely related to acupuncture – we use our body to activate the same points that acupuncturists stimulate using needles - and acupuncture has references going back to 8000 BCE in China. See the venerable Yellow Emperor's Classic dated around 1st century CE. Shiatsu also involves meridians, internal channels that we believe flow up and down and around the body through which our Ki flows and along which the points are located. A book has been found in a tomb of the Han dynasty (which was between 206BCE and 220CE) which mentions meridians only, not points, so Shiatsu has its own history, distinct from acupuncture. Then there are the simple, vigorous and effective techniques mentioned earlier which are also part of Shiatsu, the stretches and joint rotations that owe part of their development to community practitioners, often blind people, who travelled around China giving 'anma' in the villages and towns, and supplementing the family massage that always has, and still does, take place in most homes. Shiatsu then has an Oriental heritage.

The Shiatsu practitioners who participated in the ESF study will all have had a minimum of 3 years training in both Chinese Medicine, Japanese techniques, and Western anatomy, physiology and pathology. The schools where the British practitioners trained will have set syllabi based on the Core Curriculum of The Shiatsu Society which is rigorous and broad, covering the aforementioned topics plus various diagnostic methods, practitioner self development, safety and when it is necessary to refer clients to their GP or even A&E. The level of medical training allows for an understanding of the mechanics of the body's workings, an appreciation of the physiology of the organs and systems, and a knowledge of pathology that enables the practitioner to comprehend any medical diagnosis if there is one and, as I said, identify situations in which Shiatsu is inappropriate and referral to a GP is advised. My colleagues will speak about the relationship between Shiatsu and Western Medicine later this morning.

Once graduated from their Shiatsu school, new graduates have two choices if they want to develop further and use the letters MRSS (Member of the Professional Register of The Shiatsu Society) after their name.

They can participate in a further post-graduate year involving:

- 3 x supervision
- 2 x tutorials
- 100 sessions
- Have been a member of The Shiatsu Society for a minimum of 2 years
- Be insured
- Plan and review their year under the auspices of an overseeing supervisor
- Have 3 Shiatsu sessions with a MRSS practitioner
- Keep a portfolio to document their experiences

Or they can attend an assessment day where they will

- Give Shiatsu to 2 well qualified practitioners
- Be tested on theory, safety and ethics
- Provide proof of their completed 100 (minimum) treatments from the previous year
- Have a viva concerning their 2 in-depth case studies

Throughout training and assessment, students and graduates are required to participate in on-going self development in terms of raising their own energy levels and attending to their personal health. Trainees are expected to develop a particular sensitivity to the subtle flows of energy in the body, and a particular quality of touch and healing intention.

Once MRSS status has been attained, all practitioners must participate in Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in line with government guidelines

The Shiatsu Society

The Shiatsu Society (UK) was started in 19.. in order to support practitioners, the practice of Shiatsu, and to inform the public. The Society has a professional register, conferring the initials MRSS on those it recognizes as having attained a professional standard of practice. The Society was closely involved in the pilot project as well as the actual ESF research and support its findings by disseminating it and running seminars with members. We also provide a support network, an annual Congress and publish a quarterly newsletter. There **are two (?) smaller Shiatsu associations and we have been in on-going contact with them** for the past ... years, resulting in the formation of the Shiatsu regulatory Group (SRG) which has recently participated in the set up of the Complementary and Natural health Council (CNHC), the new government regulatory body.

The CNHC

The CNHC has registers of practitioners (4000 is their aim) who have completed certain National Occupational Standards and follow on-going CPD. It exists to inform and protect the public from non-professional practitioners, by offering advice on what to look for when choosing a practitioner, setting themselves up to be a clear role model, and acting as a benchmark. It will also deal with complaints if they arise.

Tamsin Grainger, Chair, The Shiatsu Society

References:

- Judy Rigby The Importance of Touch Complementary Healthcare Information Service – UK
- Dr. Zoë Pirie PhD research Fellow at The Institute of General Practice and Primary Care in the School of Health and Related Research at the University of Sheffield; ‘The Impact of Delivering Shiatsu in a General Practice’
- Book: Shiatsu Theory and Practice Carola Beresford Cooke
- www.inspire-shiatsu.org.uk Bill Palmer
- Book: Shiatsu Elaine Liechti
- ESF research by Professor Long at University of Leeds