

Editorial Note on Alternative & Integrative Medicine - Shiatsu Medicine

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Introduction

Shiatsu is an alternative medicine or therapy developed in Japan which uses techniques of anma acupressure, stretching, and Western massage. Shiatsu is done by putting pressure to special points or areas on the body in order to maintain physical and mental well-being, treat disease, or alleviate discomfort. Shiatsu therapy is considered holistic because it attempts to treat the whole person instead of a specific medical complaint. All types of acupressure generally focus on the same pressure points and so-called energy pathways, but may differ in terms of massage technique. Shiatsu, which can be translated as finger pressure, has been described as needle-free acupuncture.

In the Japanese language, shiatsu means "finger pressure". Shiatsu techniques include massages with fingers, thumbs, feet and palms; acupressure, assisted stretching; and joint manipulation and mobilization. To examine a patient, a shiatsu practitioner uses palpation and, sometimes, pulse diagnosis.

The Japanese Ministry of Health defines shiatsu as "a form of manipulation by thumbs, fingers and palms without the use of instruments, mechanical or otherwise, to apply pressure to the human skin to correct internal malfunctions, promote and maintain health, and treat specific diseases. The techniques used in shiatsu include stretching, holding, and most commonly, leaning body weight into various points along key channels. There is no evidence that shiatsu is of any benefit in treating cancer or any other disease, though some weak evidence suggests it might help people feel more relaxed. In 2015, the Australian Government's Department of Health published the results of a review of alternative therapies that sought to determine if any were suitable for being covered by health insurance; shiatsu was one of 17 therapies evaluated for which no clear evidence of effectiveness was found.

Although shiatsu is considered a generally safe, if painful, treatment, there have been reports of complications arising from its use, some of them serious. Neither qi nor meridians exist. Shiatsu evolved from anma, a Japanese style of massage developed in 1320 by Akashi Kan Ichi. Anma was popularised in the seventeenth century by acupuncturist Sugiyama Waichi, and around the same time the first books on the subject, including Fujibayashi Ryohaku's Anma Tebiki ("Manual of Anma"), appeared. The Fujibayashi school carried anma

into the modern age.[12] Prior to the emergence of shiatsu in Japan, masseurs were often nomadic, earning their keep in mobile massage capacities, and paying commissions to their referrers involved.

Since Sugiyama's time, massage in Japan had been strongly associated with the blind.[13] Sugiyama, blind himself, established a number of medical schools for the blind which taught this practice. During the Tokugawa period, edicts were passed which made the practice of anma solely the preserve of the blind – sighted people were prohibited from practicing the art. As a result, the "blind anma" has become a popular trope in Japanese culture.[14] This has continued into the modern era, with a large proportion of the Japanese blind community continuing to work in the profession.

Abdominal palpation as a Japanese diagnostic technique was developed by Shinsai Ota in the 17th century. During the Occupation of Japan by the Allies after World War II, traditional medicine practices were banned (along with other aspects of traditional Japanese culture) by General MacArthur. The ban prevented a large proportion of Japan's blind community from earning a living.[citation needed] Many Japanese entreated for this ban to be rescinded. Additionally, writer and advocate for blind rights Helen Keller, on being made aware of the prohibition, interceded with the United States government; at her urging, the ban was rescinded.

Tokujiro Namikoshi (1905–2000) founded his shiatsu college in the 1940s and his legacy was the state recognition of shiatsu as an independent method of treatment in Japan. He is often credited with inventing modern shiatsu. However, the term shiatsu was already in use in 1919, when a book called Shiatsu Ho ("finger pressure method") was published by Tamai Tempaku. Also prior to Namikoshi's system, in 1925 the Shiatsu Therapists Association was founded, with the purpose of distancing shiatsu from anma massage.

Related Journals of Shiatsu Medicine

Alternative Health Care Journals, Alternative Medicine Journals, JAAC: Augmentative and Alternative Communication, Alternative and Complementary Therapies, Alternative Therapies in Health and Medicine, Alternatives Journal, BMC Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine, Focus on Alternative and Complementary Therapies.

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