

The Wonders of Tuina Massage

by Shoshanna Katzman



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Tuina (pronounced 'twee-nah') is an ancient Chinese method of medical massage which has gained worldwide popularity as of late. It is considered to be the oldest system of bodywork and one of the four main branches of Chinese medicine along with Acupuncture, Qigong and Taiji, and Chinese herbal medicine that are traditionally used to promote natural healing of body.

As a deep form of physical massage, Tuina also focuses on balancing a person's energy based on the theory that improper flow of qi (vital energy) can cause blockages and imbalances that lead to symptoms such as pain. Its main goal is to remove energetic blocks that are causing stagnation in the flow of qi and blood along with working toward the creation of harmonious balance between yin and yang energies.

Tuina is similar to acupuncture due to how it taps into acupoints and opens flow through the energetic pathways (meridians) but employs the application of finger pressure to activate these energy points

rather than needles. A Tuina practitioner uses their fingertips, palms, knuckles, arms and elbows during a session to massage, manipulate and realign a client's muscles, bones and tendons. Results are further gained by releasing blood and qi stagnation through application of cupping and gua sha techniques.

Therapeutic effect is accomplished through application of brushing, kneading, holding, pressing, lifting and rolling techniques. Lasting results are further gained through applying acupressure in addition to oscillation and pressure that differ in force and speed. Tuina massage is excellent for addressing scar tissue at the bone level sustained from sports injury, falls, car accidents, surgery and the like.

All in all, Tuina is traditionally known for increasing blood circulation through promoting free and abundant flow of qi and blood – with many profound positive changes happening within the physical body when this takes place. Relief of neck pain and lower back pain are just a couple examples. It is often combined with assisted-stretching and joint mobiliza-

tion methods to restore range of motion, flexibility and function to a client's muscles and joints. A 2018 review and meta-analysis in Evidence-Based Complementary and Alternative Medicine suggests that Tuina massage can reduce pain and improve function for those with musculoskeletal disorders.

Keep in mind that Tuina differs from Swedish massage which employs more broad strokes with lighter intensity to relax the body and to relieve stress. This ancient form of bodywork is vigorous and works intensely on specific areas of the body. As a result, it may lead to some temporary discomfort during or after a session. Other aspects of the Tuina massage experience are gentle and relaxing especially when a practitioner is reinforcing its energetic effects. They are thus working primarily on the deeper layers of the tissues to reach and resolve the original cause of pain. This ancient form of Chinese medical massage is safe for most people, however those with a medical condition should be sure to consult their physician prior to experiencing Tuina.

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