

TCM: Healing hands

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Chinese massage involves applying manipulation to stimulate the soft tissues, stretch the muscles and mobilise the joints. One of the characteristics of massage in traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) is that it can often be brisk, as it's not just to relax or calm but to help heal. Proficient therapists should make their manipulations persistent, forceful and rhythmic yet soft, so as to achieve pressure effects that are deep and penetrating. For instance, massage therapists may repeatedly apply a single technique hundreds of times on a frozen shoulder, time that western therapists would spend on an entire treatment.

When massage is used on specific body regions, the stress acting locally can promote blood circulation and remove stagnation, restore impaired soft tissues and correct bone and joint deformities. In addition, massage creates signals that affect the transmission of fluids, qi (vital energy) and blood, which helps to regulate the functional state of the internal organs.

Massage helps balance the nervous system by soothing or stimulating the nerve endings, resulting in physiological responses that lead to healing. It also helps improve blood and lymph circulation. The rhythmic manual pressure and movements used in massage not only create a pumping effect on the blood and lymph flow, they also enhance the biological activities of the components. For example, studies show that, after massage, changes in the blood include a raised white blood count and increased blood volume.

TCM massage enhances the secretions of bio-active ingredients such as endorphins and serotonin, which relieve painful conditions. The level of the brain chemical catecholamine lowers, which helps to relax the body. Massage also eases pain, promotes local circulation, and relieves swelling and adhesions, which all facilitate the healing process of damaged tissues.

Increased metabolism also affects the body's secretions and excretions. For example, it promotes the production of gastric juices, saliva and urine. It also promotes gas exchange in the lungs, and other physiological activities. These reflect an overall increase in the metabolic rate.

Try this acupressure massage to ease stress and promote relaxation.

- 1 Sit still with eyes looking straight ahead and teeth clenched, use the palm to pat evenly over the crown of the head, 20 times.
- 2 Press the thumbs on the inner sides of the eyebrows and knead 30 times.
- 3 Wipe the forehead with the middle knuckles of the index fingers, 30 times.
- 4 Press and knead the corners of the forehead inside the hairline, 30 times.
- 5 Press and knead along the back of the head within the hairline with the thumbs, 30 times.
- 6 Knead the lateral side of the wrist on both hands, 30 times.
- 7 Knead three-finger-widths above the inner malleolus (the inner bone) of each ankle, 30 times.
- 8 Finish by rubbing the centre of the soles of the feet 30 times.

This massage is helpful for insomnia, mental fatigue and drowsiness. When kneading or pressing on particular points, there should be enough force to bring about numbness or soreness, while rubbing or wiping should create a feeling of warmth.

For an extensive listing of Chinese massage go to: <http://www.shen-nong.com/eng/treatment/massage.html>