

WHY THIS ACUPUNCTURIST SWEARS BY ABDOMINAL MASSAGE FOR BETTER DIGESTIVE HEALTH

by RACHEL LAPIDOS, JUNE 13, 2019



Photo: Getty Images/Svetlana Zayats / EyeEm

Hear the word “massage” and your mind probably goes to getting one on your back or your feet... but abdominal massage is the underrated treatment that more people should be incorporating on the reg.

“Abdominal massage is actually a subset of regular or Swedish massage or Western massage,” says [Daryl Thuroff, LAc, LMT, acupuncturist, herbalist, and massage therapist at Yinova Center](#). “There are certain aspects of Thai or Shiatsu massages that also have abdominal work in them, and that can be helpful for a variety of different things.”

Trained practitioners such as Thuroff use abdominal massage for three main things, she says: promoting digestion, increasing fertility, and helping with musculoskeletal issues. “It can also be used as a diagnostic tool,” she explains. In Eastern massage like Shiatsu, she says practitioners massage and feel the organs within the abdominal cavity to look for areas of tension, and to find out if something is excess or deficient. “There are certain aspects of Eastern massage modalities such as Thai or Shiatsu that include abdominal work since it can be helpful for diagnostic purposes as well as treatment,” says Thuroff. “Shiatsu massage utilizes a ‘Hara’ diagnosis where practitioners palpate the abdomen looking for areas of tension that may correlate with organ systems from an Eastern medicine perspective. If there’s ‘excess’ tension or ‘deficient’ energy the practitioner can adjust treatments accordingly to achieve the best results.”

That's because a lot happens in the belly—it's where your gut is located, which is central to so many other aspects of your health. "Inevitably, when the belly is stuck, it could lead to inflammation in other areas, water retention, cloudiness of mind... a lot can be happening concurrently," says Thuroff. "Stress is something that can cause things to get stuck in the middle," she adds. Basically, you want everything in your abdominal area flowing properly so that you can function optimally—which is where abdominal massage comes in.

"Ab massage helps to move energy in the body to ensure good health." says Thuroff, noting you can use it in several ways, from using hot or cold applications to regulate the temperature of the abdomen, or using Swedish-style strokes or acupressure points. "The direction of strokes may also be important depending on the condition you are treating," she says.

Techniques also vary depending on what outcome is desired. "When I do fertility-based massage, for example, I'll also incorporate acupressure points in the area of the abdomen that are correlating to others," says Thuroff. "Or if you have musculoskeletal issues, such as low back pain, I would do specific work on the psoas muscle, accessed in the abdomen to reduce pain and restore proper function."

You *can* do abdominal massage all on your own to help with gut issues, BTW. "If you do self massage, it'll be working along with the flow of the digestive system," says Thuroff. (Read: Move your hands clockwise.) "Start from the lower right and up and around to your lower left. If you're doing something for constipation or to keep the digestive system moving properly, do some round rubbing. Take your hand and rub in a clockwise fashion around the belly and end in the lower left portion." You might not even need to do the full-on massage to see relief: "It might be as easy as putting your warm hands on your abdomen in certain areas, which helps bring warmth and movement, and sometimes that's enough," Thuroff says.

If you're dealing with more chronic digestive issues (or are interested in using abdominal massage for fertility or muscular issues), Thuroff says it's best to see a professional. "If it's something very specific, it's a good idea to work with a licensed professional," she says. Other than that, though, it's surprisingly helpful to rub your own tummy for the sake of a happier gut.

Link to coverage: <http://bit.ly/2XVcU55>