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Indian Head Massage

It is gentle and nurturing and an effective de-stressing treatment for the whole body.

by Marvin Swartz



Indian head massage, also called champissage, is a holistic complementary therapy derived from India's Ayurvedic healing tradition. Originally practiced at home on female family members as part of a beauty regimen, it is now practiced on men and women in hair salons and spas throughout India and elsewhere. Indian barbers perform Champi, an invigorating scalp massage designed to refresh and stimulate an individual.

Ayurvedic philosophy considers the human body to have seven major energy centres, called chakras. The position of each chakra corresponds to a major nerve centre, or an endocrine gland. Indian head massage works on rebalancing energy in the upper three chakras, namely vishuddha, the throat chakra associated with communication; ajna, the third-eye point, located on the forehead and associated with imagination, inner vision, and psychic abilities; and sahasrara, the crown chakra associated with consciousness. Acting at a physical, mental, and spiritual level, Indian head massage stimulates these important energy centres, rebalancing the body's energy and promoting relaxation, positive energy, and a sense of well-being.

Traditionally, oils such as coconut, sesame, almond, and olive infused with herbs, spices, or essential oils with therapeutic properties were applied to the scalp and hair during the treatment. The use of oils is optional but can greatly enhance the positive benefits of the treatment. If oils are used, they should be allowed to remain on the scalp for at least an hour. Removal of the oil is best accomplished by first adding shampoo to the oiled hair and then adding water.

Originally restricted to the scalp, the massage now encompasses work on the upper back, shoulders, upper arms, neck, ears, and face. The treatment is relaxing, effective at relieving body aches and pains. It is gentle and nurturing and an effective de-stressing treatment for the whole body.

The massage is done with the fully clothed client sitting upright in a chair. Partial undressing and/or wearing suitable attire is necessary if clients wish to have oils applied. During an Indian head massage, different movements and techniques are applied, including effleurage or smoothing, deep kneading, and compression movements. Frictioning, rubbing, stroking, squeezing, tapping, plucking, ruffling, and hacking using the fingers, palms, heel, and lateral side of the hands are performed. Pressure points on the head and neck are gently stimulated. The techniques are performed in sequence, although a therapist may choose to spend more time on certain movements to better benefit the client.

Prior to the treatment, a client health questionnaire is completed, concerns and problem areas are identified, and written consent is obtained from the client. Contraindications include neck and shoulder injuries, recent surgery, blood clotting history, blood pressure fluctuations, acute infections such as skin or scalp disorders, open wounds, and severe osteoporosis. Clients should not be in the throes of a severe headache or migraine.

The massage starts on the upper back and shoulders, moving to the upper arms, and then the neck. The entire scalp is worked on to encourage blood circulation. The effect of this is to promote a healthy scalp and release tension. The massage then proceeds to the temples, which are rubbed in a firm, circular motion. Soft gliding strokes are performed on the face and the treatment ends by positioning the hands over the throat, third eye, and crown chakras to rebalance the energy. Clients may then lean forward and rest their head on a pillow for a

few minutes.

The length of an Indian head massage averages 30 minutes but can be longer, if so desired. It can also be easily incorporated with other facial treatments and/or massage modalities such as Thai yoga massage to include work on the lower body and the other chakras.

The following physical and mental benefits have been attributed to Indian head massage, although claims have not been scientifically documented.

Physical benefits

- Reduces frequency of migraines and headaches
- Relieves sinusitis
- Improves stress-related disorders
- Reduces insomnia and disturbed sleep
- Increases suppleness and flexibility of the scalp, neck, and shoulders
- Increases oxygen and glucose supply to the brain
- Stimulates the scalp and promotes hair growth
- Increases cerebral spinal fluid circulation
- Improves muscle tone
- Calms the respiratory system, helping asthma
- Stimulates the circulatory and lymphatic systems

Mental benefits

- Promotes a sense of calmness, peace, and tranquility
- Decreases anxiety, stress, and mental strain
- Improves memory, focus, and alertness
- Promotes relaxation
- Renews energy

During my recent training and certification in Indian head massage at the Balnea Institute in Burlington, Ontario, I received numerous Indian head massages and can attest to the positive effects of the treatment. I experienced a profound sense of calmness and relaxation at the end of each treatment. Indian head massage is adding a new dimension to my practice as a Thai Yoga massage practitioner.

Marvin Swartz of Saskatoon has been a certified Lotus Palm Thai Yoga Massage Practitioner since 2002, and is a member of the Natural Health Practitioners of Canada. He has taken training in complementary bodywork modalities, such as Thai herbal compress massage as well as myofascial release techniques with Thomas Myers and James Waslaski, to provide clients with a range of techniques to address their individual needs. To book an appointment, please call (306) 249-1073 or email: thai221@sasktel.net. Evening and weekend appointments available. Also see the Directory of Services ad on page 27 of the 18.5 January/February issue of the WHOLife Journal.

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