

Energetic Aquatic Shiatsu Yoga Clinical Aichi --- Shoulder

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People who experience Ai Chi quickly discover the healing energy that exists naturally in the body and mind. They feel gentle energy flowing all over the body, and the body becomes aware of improvement in range of motion, balance and mobility. We often feel relaxed and our minds are at peace.

Shiatsu

With Clinical Ai Chi (EASY), we add Shiatsu concepts which are based on the holistic system of traditional oriental medicine. This Japanese healing art is based on the principal that the body can heal itself and specific challenges in body and mind. It enables anyone to maximize health through the use of healing touch on particular points along the body - typically the same points an acupuncturist uses when treating clients.

When I have shoulder tension, naturally I touch my shoulder where it hurts. My hands automatically reach out to touch pain, and I find comfort in pressing lightly or massaging the aching spot. Through gentle touch on a painful point, we open up the underlying energy of that point with our hands. Shiatsu is simply a step beyond that natural urge to touch pain.

Shiatsu seeks to understand not only the area in which you feel pain, but the whole body, so that healing energy is allowed to flow freely throughout all the meridians (energy pathways). Pain becomes an important teacher that instructs us about the imbalances in body and mind.

Meridians

Oriental medicine is based on the principle that healing energy is flowing throughout our entire body all the time, through twelve meridians. "The communication network with the fascia is none other than the meridian system of traditional Oriental medicine"¹ As long as energy flows smoothly and without blockage, we are healthy. We become ill when the energy stagnates along the meridians. Therefore, an understanding of meridians is essential.²

So what is a meridian? Imagine your body as the earth. As you may know, about 70 percent of the earth's surface is water, mostly ocean water. Similarly, our bodies are made up of about 70 percent water. Ocean water is constantly moving (in the form of currents) and has both a high and low tide. Can you imagine no movement in the water of the ocean? Indeed, when waters stagnate, much natural life within it dies. Our bodies, similar to the earth, rely on the free movement of "tides" to bring forth and maintain the fragile "ecosystems" that support the continued existence of life.

Ocean water is constantly moving because the powerful pull of the sun and the moon creates the constant ebb and flow of tides. This movement (current and tide) is similar to the energy flowing along the meridians of the body. Energy is constantly moving smoothly throughout the body's meridians at the pull of both the sun and the moon. Therefore, a key to good health is to live harmoniously with the flows of these tides within our meridians. Shiatsu is the tool that opens up our miraculous healing energy to the life-sustaining pull of the sun and the moon.

¹ From *Energy Medicine* by James Oschman

² The relationship between acupuncture pathways and patterns of pain experienced by his patients suffering with myofascial constrictions was supported in a study. See A. J. R. Macdonald in Peter E. Baldry, *Acupuncture*, 44-45

Body and Mind are One

Oriental medicine believes that the balance of Yin and Yang is fundamental for life's vitality. Ai Chi is a good foundation for creating balance for both body and mind, as well as feeling the smooth movement of life energy. Through Clinical Ai Chi (EASY), we will consciously connect with the universal energy of Yin and Yang by inviting it into our bodies and minds.

Why? Connecting with this energy is refreshing and develops a strong foundation for yin and yang balance.

How? To me that is the essential part of Ai Chi. "Ai" 愛 合 means love and harmony, "Chi" means life energy. So it means the way to harmonize life energy with love --- how to become one with nature so we can invite universal energy into our own life energy. When we love something, we feel a vibration of happiness in our hearts and it is easy to accept outside energy. For example, when we go to a beautiful beach, we naturally jump into the ocean. As we take a deep breath, happiness bubbles up from deep inside our bodies. That is our nature. It is also easy to create this happiness through visualization. Our mind's energy is constantly moving, why not use it in a healthy way, so that our bodies become healthier with positive energy.

One of the unique aspects of Ai Chi and Clinical Ai Chi (EASY) is that we are in the water at heart level and most of the movement is coming from the heart. We are constantly giving and receiving the energy of the heart (love) and harmonizing with outside energy. It is essential to connect the energy of "love" and "harmony" with universal energy. Once we connect with universal love, we can vibrate together and communicate (giving and receiving) freely like an ocean's current. This means we don't need to hold in our hearts (chests and upper bodies) and it is much easier to flow and relax our shoulders.

Treating Shoulder Tension with Clinical Ai Chi (EASY)

Let me explain about shoulder tension and how I heal myself either on land or water. When I have shoulder tension, I first touch my body, specifically on certain acupuncture points, to discover which meridians are imbalanced. Such imbalances are clear when certain acupuncture points are sensitive or tender. For example, if Gall Bladder 21 which is located on the top of the shoulder is sensitive to touch. I consciously stretch the Gall Bladder meridian with breath to open up the flow of energy to the entire body. The Gall Bladder meridian is the "wood" element, so I consciously visualize a healthy tree with bright green leaves and invite that healthy vibration of energy into my own Gall Bladder meridian. Then I consciously hold and press other points on that meridian, for example Gall Bladder 40 which is located on the lateral side of the ankle bone. An important technique for stretching is to move slowly and relax, so energy flows smoothly through the meridians.³ Often Gall Bladder 40 is also sensitive to touch (it means the Gall Bladder meridian is stagnated and tension is accumulated in the shoulder), so stretch and hold the point until the tenderness (energy trapped within) releases and you can feel a good pain (sensitivity). Because of the smoother flow of energy, naturally Gall Bladder 21 is less sensitive to touch and easier to release the shoulder tension. Gall Bladder 21 means "shoulder well". Ancient Chinese people felt that a fresh spring was bubbling up from this point when it opened up. Can you imagine a fresh bubbling spring on your shoulder? It feels good just to think about it. In this way, I open up the "wood" element and strengthen the entire wood element in my body.

³ The main differences between a Yin and a Yang Yoga practice are that Yin postures should be done with the muscles relaxed and be held a long time. This is because connective tissue does not stretch like muscle and will not respond well to brief stresses." From *Yin Yoga* by Paul Grilley

Healing the whole body

Once we open up the “wood” element, we can nurture it by strengthening the other elements. For example, we need “water” to grow a tree (wood) and at the same time we need to nurture the “earth” in which the tree is standing. A tree’s root grows deep inside of the earth, and once the tree is grounded deep inside the earth, it can grow strong towards heaven. Of course, in heaven there is the sun (fire element) shining and there is fresh air (metal element) moving. To grow strong a tree needs all of these elements to support each other. This is the five element theory and it is the key not only to healing symptoms but healing the whole body and mind. It means we are not healing just one part of our body but the whole body. For example, when people come to see me for shoulder-tension, they can also learn to heal other symptoms such as stomach issues, headaches, insomnia. It is very important for me to educate people so that they can heal themselves through self-care, such as clinical Ai Chi.

In practicing Ai Chi, we move the whole body in order to open up all the meridians and nourish all the elements, so that our whole body and mind get healthier.

Oriental Medicine recognizes how powerful our universe is. It heals and creates balance naturally. We know our bodies and minds are part of this powerful universe. Through Ai Chi and Clinical Ai Chi, we understand and recognize we are one (the universe and ourselves) and the key to health and happiness is to appreciate and honor this mystery of life.

Your heart is full of fertile seeds, waiting to sprout, just as a lotus flower springs from the mire to bloom splendidly, the interaction of the cosmic breath causes the flower of the spirit to bloom and bear fruit in this world.

Moriei Ueshiba

---- founder of Aikido

Shizuto Masunaga is a name very familiar to meridian-based shiatsu therapists around the world for his daring research, which in the 1960s culminated in the publication of the Shiatsu Meridian Chart. Masunaga's book *Zen Shiatsu* (Japan Publications Inc, 1977)

Vega RH. Shiatsu, a pressure technique. Physical Therapy. 55(4):381-382, 1975.

This is an early account of Shiatsu by the Chief Physical Therapist of a medical centre in New Mexico, USA. It includes four very brief vignettes and suggests that Shiatsu may be useful in helping to alleviate a range of symptoms including muscle spasms, headaches, low back pain, painful shoulder and limitation of movement.