

# a new take on massage

Therapists let their feet do the rubbing.

**I** NEVER THOUGHT I'd say this, but I want to get walked on. Between sitting at my computer for long periods of time, carrying my 2-year-old daughter, and working out regularly, I've always got a tight, achy back.

That's why I was excited when I heard about Ashitsu Oriental Bar Therapy, a type of massage that uses feet, not hands, to apply pressure. Experts in the field say this method allows therapists to get more deeply

into the muscles than they can with their hands, so it better relieves stress and tension and improves posture and flexibility.

Still, I was nervous. My first concern: It would hurt. My second: I'd have a stranger's bare feet on my bare back—what if they were, well, gross? And finally: Was this dangerous? Specifically, would this person crush me?

After undressing completely, I lay facedown on the table. Melissa, my

masseuse at Sunpoint Spa in New York, slathered her feet (which, by the way, were in pristine condition) with lotion and sat on a tall stool at the same end of the massage table as my head. She leaned back a bit and then dug her heels into my upper back, generating just the right amount of pressure to untie the knots. Next, she stood on the table and, holding onto bars suspended from the ceiling, began massaging my spinal area, lower back, butt, and legs, using her feet to create strokes that pushed and pulled my muscles. (After 5 minutes, I stopped worrying that she would come crashing down on top of me.) It never felt as if there were a pair of feet working on me. In fact, it was by far the best massage I've ever had. For 2 days afterward, I was sore—a normal result of Ashitsu therapy—but every inch of me felt more relaxed and flexible.

The technique isn't for someone who likes a light touch: It's all about serious pressure. To be sure it was safe, I checked with an orthopedic surgeon. "If you're healthy, with no back problems, it's probably fine," says Edward Toriello, M.D., a spokesman for the American Academy of Orthopaedic Surgeons. "But for women past menopause, it's important to make sure you don't have osteoporosis or other back problems before you have this done, or you could risk a fracture." Others who shouldn't get walked on include people with heart conditions, those with high blood pressure, and pregnant women (go figure). Of course, you shouldn't let just anyone slip-slide along your spine; find a certified therapist at [www.deepfeet.com](http://www.deepfeet.com).—*Michele Bender*

**FANCY FOOTWORK:**  
A wooden parallel bar supports the therapist, giving her control over pressure.

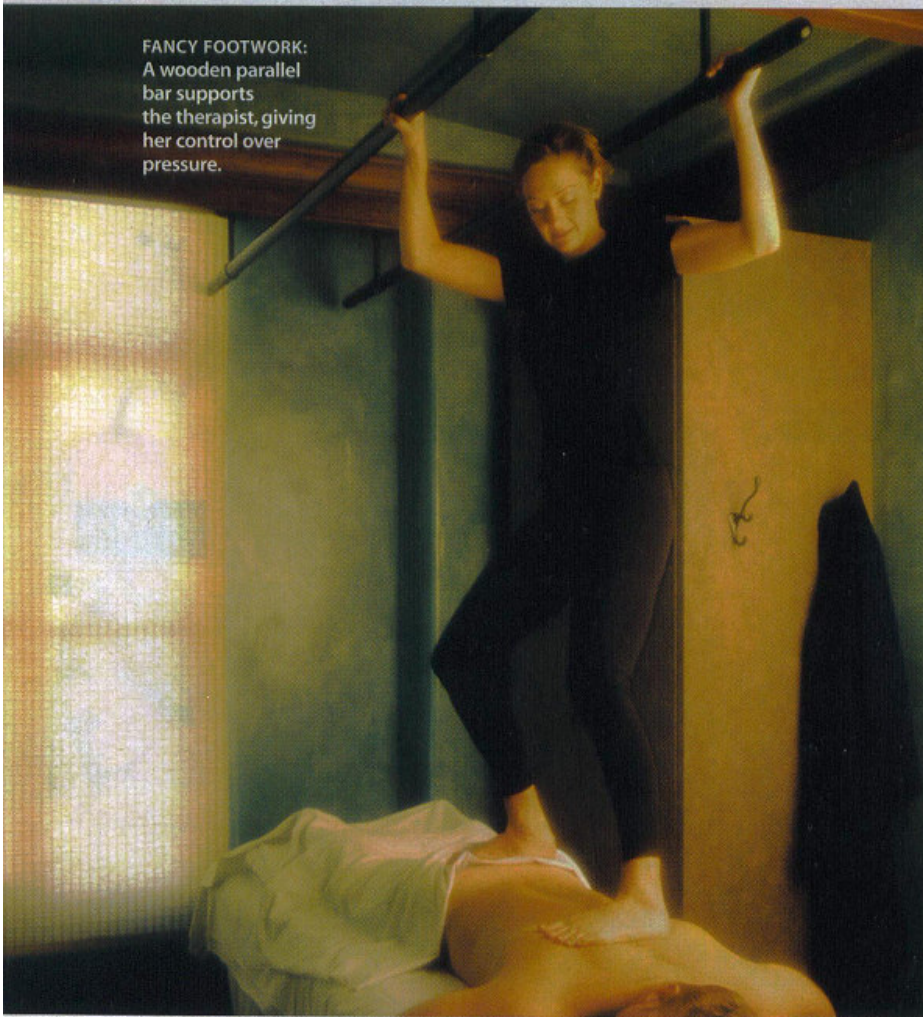


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