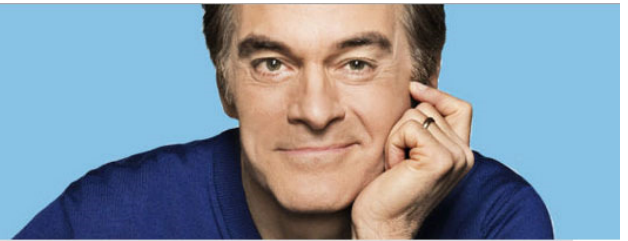


DR.OZ THE GOOD LIFE



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AUG 31, 2015 @ 7:00 PM

WELLNESS BODY MASSAGE PAIN MANAGEMENT

Would You Pay Someone to Walk on You?

Don't try this at home.

BY JANE BIANCHI

Letting people walk all over you is usually a bad thing; but in the massage world, letting people walk all over you is a treat.

Getting its name from the Japanese words "ashi" (foot) and "atsu" (pressure), Ashiatsu massage is an ancient type of Asian bodywork that is done solely — no pun intended — with the massage therapist's feet.

Traditionally, only those with expertise in Eastern medicine could perform Ashiatsu, and the client lay fully clothed on the ground. In the early 1990s, Ruthie Piper Hardee, a U.S. massage therapist, created the Ashiatsu DeepFeet Bar Therapy (also known as Ashiatsu Oriental Bar Therapy), which blends elements of the original method with newer, more Western techniques.

How Ashiatsu Massages Are Performed

The massage is still performed with the feet, but the client lies on a massage table unclothed like they would for a typical massage. Unlike your typical massage, however, the massage therapist either stands on the table and holds onto parallel bars that hang from the ceiling or sits on a stool next to the table.

The Popularity of the Massage

There are currently 5,689 practitioners of this type of Ashiatsu in the United States and that number is growing, according to Jeni Spring, a licensed massage therapist and certified Ashiatsu instructor at [Healing Sole](#) in San Antonio, Texas.

"I've seen a big increase in classes where I teach massage therapists how to perform Ashiatsu," she says. "There's definitely a movement among massage therapists who want to save their hands and lengthen their careers."

The Difference Between Ashiatsu and Other Massages

As you might guess, an Ashiatsu massage goes extra deep — much deeper than the common Swedish massage and even deeper than a deep tissue massage.

"Gravity and the therapist's body weight behind it helps us penetrate below the superficial layers of tissue, and because we use our feet instead of fingers, it doesn't feel 'pokey,'" Spring says.

A therapist might use the flat surface of the foot, as well as the ball, heel, side of the foot or base of the big toe. The therapist will typically perform a full-body massage, but if a client prefers to focus on one particular muscle group, the therapist may be able to customize the massage.



George Weynand

Who Benefits from Ashiatsu Massages

Spring recommends Ashiatsu for people who have chronic pain in their muscles as well as people who have range-of-motion problems.

"Athletes may be the best candidates. They tend to have tense, tight muscles, and their strong bodies can withstand the increase in pressure," says Paul Christo, MD, associate professor at The Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland, and host of [Aches and Gains](#), a national radio show dedicated to overcoming pain, reducing stress and living healthfully.

"A couple of my patients — both were athletes — found that Ashiatsu massage helped them relieve tension in the lower back," Dr. Christo adds.

If you're interested in trying out Ashiatsu massage, definitely check with your primary care physician first. This type of bodywork is not for everyone, including those who have had any augmentation done recently (such as breast implants), those who have had a recent injury or surgery, those with heart problems or heart devices (such as a pacemaker), those with nerve-related pain and pregnant women.

The Major Health Benefits

There is no large-scale research on the health benefits of Ashiatsu massage, but Christo notes that massage in general can have many positive effects on the body and mind.

"It's been shown to help people with [back pain](#), migraines, [fibromyalgia](#), carpal tunnel and rheumatoid arthritis," he says. "It can also reduce something in the body called substance P (which causes pain), improve sleep, increase circulation, boost immunity, raise levels of serotonin (a feel-good neurotransmitter) and decrease levels of cortisol (a stress hormone)."

What to Expect, and Where to Find Your Nearest Studio

Once you get used to the therapist's technique, you'll find Ashiatsu is similar to other types of massage in most ways. It generally lasts 50 to 90 minutes, you're in a private room with dim lighting, the therapist uses oil or lotion and you usually have your choice of music and aromatherapy during the massage. Cost varies by studio, but expect to pay roughly \$90 to \$150 per session.

If you're interested in trying this type of massage, make sure the practitioner is a licensed massage therapist and certified in Ashiatsu. Don't take any chances — a poorly performed massage can have serious health consequences.

"If it isn't performed correctly, it could lead to tissue damage, broken bones, bruises or nerve damage," Christo says.

To find a qualified practitioner in your state, a great place to start is [DeepFeet.com](#). "You're more likely to find Ashiatsu massage offered at an independent studio as opposed to a chain," Spring says.