



# SHIATSU

A THERAPEUTIC METHOD

IN INTEGRATED HEALTH CARE

by Wilfried Rappenecker (General practitioner)

# SHIATSU

## Origin and history in the West

Shiatsu originates from Japan and presents a form of therapeutic bodywork that is recognised by the Japanese Ministry of Health.

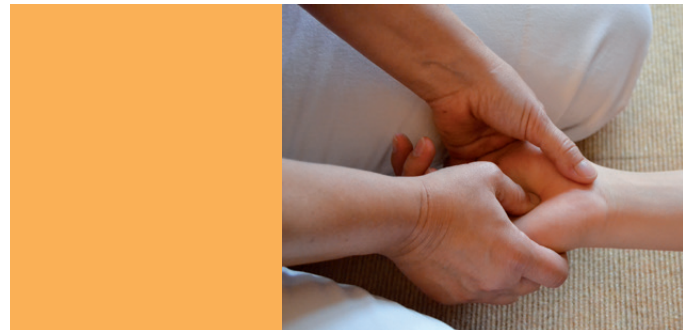
The theoretic foundations of Shiatsu correspond largely to those of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM). The role played by Shiatsu in the Japanese health service in parts is similar to that of physiotherapy in Europe.

Today Shiatsu is used in therapy, education, preventative health care, the care of people in need as well as the Wellness sector. Therapeutic Shiatsu represents an effective way of treating many disorders and illnesses. In a report on complementary therapies published by the EU Commission in 1997 Shiatsu is listed as one of eight therapies. Since 2015 Shiatsu is state-recognized as a complementary therapy in Switzerland.



## Basic Principles of Shiatsu

The basic Shiatsu technique can be described as follows: the therapist sinks with their palm, thumb, or elbow into the body surface of the receiving person and, for a moment, continues to maintain the contact within the depth. This deep contact is of particular significance for the therapeutic effect of Shiatsu. During the treatment (duration approximately 40 minutes) it will be repeated again and again at specifically chosen areas of the patient's body.



It is this basic technique (as well as some others) that distinguishes Shiatsu from classic massage and the techniques generally used in physiotherapy. Shiatsu has a more intense and deeper effect both on a physical and on a psychological level – it is a truly effective method.

Meridians (as used in acupuncture) play an important role in the form of Shiatsu practiced in the West. These 'energy pathways' allow the giver to influence also such areas of the patient's body that are inaccessible to direct touch, for example in post-operative treatments or treatments after accidents.

Shiatsu is usually carried out on a mat on the floor with the patient fully clothed. Working on the floor has the advantage that the giver can modify the use of their weight more easily in order to apply pressure and to establish deep contact without actual physical exertion. It is also possible to give Shiatsu on a bed or treatment couch, for example in a hospital setting or when treating patients who, for various reasons, are not able to lie on a mat on the floor.

## General Effects of Shiatsu

The patient's sensorimotor system probably uses the consecutive stimuli of the deep contact to re-organise itself in an as yet unknown way. In this context the effect on the fascia system seems to play a crucial role as well as the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system. This is experienced by the patient as deeply calming and relaxing. However, the specific effects of Shiatsu and its sometimes amazing treatment results are to date not fully understood.

As TCM, Shiatsu interprets illness and disorders of any kind not only as the result of a local dysfunction or an isolated organ disease. Rather they are considered as an expression of the general condition of the homoeostatic system of an individual. Healing or alleviating the symptoms of a disorder, even if only a local one, requires a change of the patient's whole system.

The general effects of Shiatsu have been described in various studies as follows: promotion of the healing process, improvement of locally impaired range of motion, reduction of pain, lightening of the mood, generally increased tolerance towards stress or other particular disorders, improvement of sleep, better appetite, improved awareness of one's own body.

The improved awareness of one's own body appears to be an important aspect of the effects of Shiatsu when treating patients during a psychological crisis or with post-traumatic stress disorder since these conditions usually lead to a decrease in one's physical awareness.

## What can Shiatsu treat?

The classic area in which Shiatsu is used successfully includes musculo-skeletal disorders, for example back pain and joint disorders. Good results are also achieved in cancer therapy (reducing side effects of chemotherapy), perioperative care as well as rehabilitation after injuries and surgery. Shiatsu is increasingly used instead of physiotherapy for neurological, orthopaedic and surgical patients.



Sleep disorders, functional disorders such as headaches, TMJ disorders, chest tightness despite healthy heart function, stomach disorders or menstrual problems all respond very well to the touch of Shiatsu. In pain therapy as well as palliative care Shiatsu may present an important part of a multimodal treatment protocol. In oncology it is used for dealing with anxiety, not only for the affected person, but also for the patient's relatives.

During times of psychological stress or life crises Shiatsu can be of great benefit. For example, in cases of post-traumatic stress disorder it may effectively complement trauma therapy. By the same token, Shiatsu is also very helpful for anorexia and burnout syndrome.







## Training

Throughout Europe Shiatsu therapists and practitioners are organised in national professional associations with clearly defined minimum requirements at accredited colleges.

For example the requirement by the "Shiatsu Society" in UK is a part-time training of at least 3 years with a minimum of 500 contact hours and a total qualification time of 1000 hours. Fundamental medical principles such as anatomy, physiology and pathology as well as the principles of the patient-practitioner relationship form an essential part of a good training in Shiatsu.

## Studies

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- Rackeseder C., Drabek R. 2005: **Kann Shiatsu als Zusatztherapie Heilungsprozesse positiv beeinflussen?** Wien
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- Lucini, D. et al. 2009. **Complementary medicine for the management of chronic stress**
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- Gryllaki, M et al. 2011: **A Study of the Effects of Shiatsu on Pain Management** University Aretaieion Hospital Athens
- Robinson, N. et al. 2011: **The Evidence for Shiatsu: a Systematic Review of Shiatsu and Acupressure** BMC Complement Altern Med.
- Pooley, N. et al. 2013: **What do shiatsu practitioners treat? A nationwide survey**

- Yuan, S.L. et al. 2013. **Effects of Shiatsu in the Management of Fibromyalgia Symptoms** A Controlled Pilot Study
- Kleinau, A. et al. 2016. **A Review of Shiatsu and an Endpoint Analysis (Meta-Analysis) of Controlled Studies on the Efficacy of Shiatsu Research**
- Browne, N. et al. 2018. **Relieving pressure – an evaluation of Shiatsu treatments for cancer and palliative care patients in an NHS setting**

## Literatur

Carola Beresford-Cook 2016: **Shiatsu – Theory and Practise** – a description of the theoretical foundations of Shiatsu

Wilfried Rappenecker + Meike Kockrick 2009:

**Atlas of Shiatsu: The Meridians of Zen Shiatsu**

2nd edition, a detailed description of the meridian pathways used in Shiatsu.

Shizuto Masunaga: **Zen Shiatsu: How to Harmonize Yin and Yang for Better Health**

Chris Jarney 2000: **Shiatsu: The Complete Guide** (Revised Edition)

Paul Lundberg 2014: **The Book of Shiatsu: Vitality and Health Through the Art of Touch**

**Contributions from the 2nd, 3rd and 4th European Shiatsu Conference**

Kiental 2007, 2011 and 2014 – Contains all contributions from these conferences.

To order a copy please contact: Kientalerhof – Centre for Wellness and Creativity, [info@kientalerhof.ch](mailto:info@kientalerhof.ch); +41 33 6762676

## Contact addresses

Please contact one of the following addresses if you are looking for an experienced Shiatsu practitioner:

**UK:** <https://www.shiatusociety.org/find-practitioners>

**Ireland:** <http://shiatusocietyireland.org/shiatsu-treatments/>

**Germany:** Gesellschaft für Shiatsu in Deutschland (GSD)  
+49 40 85506736, [info@shiatsu-gsd.de](mailto:info@shiatsu-gsd.de), [www.shiatsu-gsd.de](http://www.shiatsu-gsd.de)

**Hamburg:** Schule für Shiatsu Hamburg, Oelkersallee 33, 22769 Hamburg  
+49 40 4301885, [schule@fuer-shiatsu.de](mailto:schule@fuer-shiatsu.de), [www.schule-fuer-shiatsu.de](http://www.schule-fuer-shiatsu.de)

**Austria:** Österreichischer Dachverband für Shiatsu (ÖDS), +43 2272 82228  
[info@shiatsu-verband.at](mailto:info@shiatsu-verband.at), [www.shiatsu-verband.at](http://www.shiatsu-verband.at)

**Switzerland:** Shiatsu-Gesellschaft Schweiz (SGS), +41 56 4271573  
[gs@shiatsu-verband.ch](mailto:gs@shiatsu-verband.ch), [www.shiatsu-sgs.ch](http://www.shiatsu-sgs.ch)

## Editor

**Wilfried Rappenecker** is a general practitioner and for many years was director of the Schule fuer Shiatsu Hamburg as well as of the International Shiatsu School Kiental (Switzerland).

