

HISTORY OF INDIAN HEAD MASSAGE

Indian head massage has a history of over 1,000 years and is referred to in ancient Ayurvedic writings (Ayurvedic medicine is an ancient health care system native to the Indian subcontinent). Indian head massage, also known as 'champi' was first used by Indian women to keep their long hair in good condition. 'Champi' is a Hindu word that translates as 'massage of the head'.

The early methods of Indian head massage involved the use of sesame, olive or coconut oil. The massage was said to promote hair growth and better circulation while the oils improved the hair's texture. Barbers used the same skills for male clients but the treatment differed in that the scalp would be massaged vigorously for stimulation.

Indian head massage was introduced to the UK in 1973 by Narendra Mehta. Mehta arrived in the country to train as a physiotherapist and was disappointed to find that head massage wasn't available and the head was neglected in a full body massage. He returned to India to study the Indian head massage techniques and extended the therapy to also massage the face, neck, shoulders and upper arms. He combined his new method with Ayurvedic elements to create a holistic therapy that would benefit the whole body.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Indian head massage focuses on the chakras, or energy nodes, of the upper body. Seven chakras are said to run from the base of the spine to the top of the head and balance the body's physical and mental health. Indian head massage affects the three upper chakras and when these energy nodes become blocked, it can be detrimental to a person's physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

Indian head massage relaxes tension in muscle tissue around the head, face, neck, shoulders and arms. By relaxing and stimulating these areas, blood flow increases and energy balance is restored within the chakras. This removes stress and anxiety and flushes toxins from the body. It can also improve skin tone, increase mobility in the upper body and enhance concentration.

There are two methods of Indian head massage: Traditional Ayurvedic and Western Style. Treatment can also utilise acupuncture and shiatsu and incorporate essential oils.

A TYPICAL APPOINTMENT

Be prepared - It is advisable to choose an Indian head massage practitioner who is a member of, or is accredited by, an association or professional body. This ensures your massage is carried out in a suitable environment and by someone who has received formal training and ongoing development. Members are also bound to a code of ethics and practice. The main Indian head massage organisations are listed at the foot of this article.

Do not drink alcohol on the day of your appointment but do drink plenty of water. Have a light snack (nothing spicy or fatty) a couple of hours before you see the practitioner. Wear loose, comfortable clothing and allow plenty of time to get to your appointment; hurrying will affect your physical and mental well-being and be detrimental to the effects of the massage.

Before your appointment, spend time thinking about your condition and what you expect to achieve with Indian head massage - you may want to reduce muscle tension, gain a sense of calmness in your life or stimulate energy. Make some notes about your expectations as this will aid your therapist.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Your Indian head massage will take place in a warm and relaxing environment. Your therapist will spend time during your first appointment questioning you about your medical history, general health, lifestyle and sleep patterns. They will also ask if you are taking any medications as this can affect any oils that they may use.

You'll be sat upright in a chair for your Indian head massage and your practitioner will use a variety of movements across your head, face, neck, shoulders and arms. Some will involve compression and kneading techniques that will feel unusual but shouldn't hurt. If your practitioner recommends acupuncture or shiatsu to enhance your treatment they will discuss this with you beforehand.

After your session you may feel invigorated or slightly dizzy, you may also feel the need to urinate. Indian head massage releases toxins in the body that need to be flushed out so drink plenty of water after your session. Your therapist will discuss the treatment with you and then make recommendations for any further sessions.

TIMINGS / SESSIONS / COSTS

Your first Indian head massage session may take longer than subsequent sessions as your practitioner questions you about your medical history and then explains the treatment. Expect this session to last 60 minutes and follow-up sessions about 30 minutes. If your therapist recommends alternative therapies the session may take a little longer.

The cost for Indian head massage varies so check with your local practitioner before making an appointment. Expect to pay £20 - £40 for your first session with subsequent sessions costing £15 - £30. Indian head massage can be carried out anywhere and home or work visits are sometimes available. Be aware that these visits may incur additional costs.

Many people feel the benefits of Indian head massage from the first session and attend on a weekly basis to alleviate stress and invigorate the body. Certain chronic conditions may require more than one session to treat and a course of four to six sessions is recommended.

IS IT RIGHT FOR YOU?

Indian head massage is a safe and effective therapy and is able to help treat a variety of conditions such as insomnia, stress, tiredness, sinusitis, migraines & headaches. It is also beneficial to help de-stress the mind and body. If you have a neck injury or head injury or suffer with a condition of the spine or circulatory system it is advisable to consult a doctor before making an appointment.

Consult with your GP and Indian head massage practitioner about any problems or concerns you have as they are trained to recognise what can and cannot be treated with the therapy.