

## THE NEW FRONTIER OF THAI YOGA MASSAGE

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Jan 2005

You have just walked into the room. The sounds of gentle flute music drift through the air. Your clothes are loose and soft against your skin and the city noises fade out as you close your eyes and lie back on a soft wide mat. As your therapist moves and supports you through a series of gentle stretches, the world outside the room fades away. Your eyes close. Your first Thai Massage has begun.

When I first experienced the flow of Thai Massage, it resembled a yoga class in its focus on sequences of guided stretches. However, as I was guided through the treatment, the therapist used a large variety of very simple postures to release tension and accumulated stress on every level.

Since that time I have had many Thai Massage sessions. I have even become a practicing therapist after seeing how much better others have felt after experiencing this modality. We have so many options when it comes to taking care of our health and well being. With the popularity of yoga comes a renewed interest in new forms of therapy and self care.

It is amazing to see that many of the ancient teachings of healing are becoming new again, and with the increasing numbers of teachers and students alike, there are new twists on the old traditions. However, within the structure of these ancient traditions there exists a foundation rooted in thousands of years of tested and true methods of achieving wellness and health. This has been the primary reason that they have stood the test of time.

Thai Massage is now becoming recognized as a vital complement to this hectic and fast-paced society we live in. As we try new ideas and new therapies we each find our own balance that suits each individual. While its popularity is growing here in Canada and the U.S., Thai Massage is rapidly becoming the fastest growing therapy due to its combination of ancient simplicity and wisdom. It treats all body types and flexibility levels since it is tailored to suit the individual needs of every client. The smooth

focused transitions of each movement resemble the martial art of Tai Chi; with roots in Japanese Shiatsu and Hatha Yoga.

As the practice of yoga has traveled many miles to become part of this culture; Thai Massage brings with it an ancient and well traveled past. It originated over 2500 years ago in the temples of Thailand, near the border of India. With its flowing, kneading, stretching and gentle rocking movements, Thai Massage treats your entire body, providing a safe and powerful vehicle for physical transformation.

As the treatment continues, you may find yourself lying on your side, supported by pillows as the therapist glides your shoulder in smooth circles with your arm supported until you no longer have the sense of your own weight. You may begin to experience a sense of floating, as you are rolled gently onto your back. There is no pressing phone calls, crammed schedules or family duties. You have carved out this time for yourself amidst the clamor and bustle of the city. You deserve it.

Since it does not use oils and is performed in loose comfortable clothing, Thai massage is a great way for those who have not experienced a massage before to enjoy the benefits and pleasure of bodywork without having to worry about disrobing. It has evolved to suit the particular needs of the Western World. Since we spend so much time at desks and are less inclined to walk as much as an agriculturally based society; we are more inclined to accumulate tension in our upper body and are generally taller and heavier in build. The focus therefore tends to be on the shoulders, back, and neck; areas that are chronically tight. However, a full Thai Massage treatment lasts approximately one and a half hours and is designed as a comprehensive full body treatment. Due to the variety of techniques each session can be changed to suit your particular preference. Some prefer a gentle session, while others love the strong and deep stretches. Why not try out both? With open communication between you and your therapist, you can always customize the session. As you become more familiar with the vast array of postures your therapist offers, you will find that your experience and ability to relax increases. This evolving together as therapist and client is a vital part of the intricate nature of Thai Massage.

Each Thai Massage practitioner is trained to be constantly aware of even the most subtle aspects of each session. With special attention to the balance and correct alignment of each posture, they are attuning to the

breath rhythms, the pressure points, and energy lines in the body. Through meditation and focused awareness these are all synchronized to create an environment of safety and awareness.

Are you sweating when you try to touch your toes? Do you have to sit down to tie your shoelaces? Does the thought of going to a yoga class leave you feeling out of breath and scared stiff? Thai Massage is a great way to experience the benefits of yoga while increasing your own range of motion and encouraging your body to heal itself in a quiet and serene environment.

Our joints and connective tissue can become less flexible as we age, and Thai Massage is especially effective at targeting tension in the joints, tendons, ligaments, and muscles. When the body is guided into these stretches it helps clear out metabolic waste and improves circulation. When you walk more freely, you feel better and you enjoy a more positive frame of mind which is a large part of better overall health, physically, mentally, and spiritually.

If you are active in sports or regular physical activity, Thai Massage is an excellent accompaniment to even the most hectic training schedule. Since it is a static and direct stretch, in proper alignment with the body's natural range of movement, it allows for an increased opening throughout the entire body. For those who find liberation on their yoga mat in the studio they will enjoy the increased flexibility and strength that results from a Thai Massage session. Working with the breath and the gentle rocking movement allows the practitioner to provide a specific and proper stretch without any exertion on your part. No more straining to push your self into a towering tree posture or rearing cobra pose. It has been called "lazy yoga" and why not, the work is done for you!

As the therapist clears away the remains of the day and the session comes to a gentle close, you feel invigorated and filled with peace. The body releases endorphins during sustained physical activity and Thai Massage is no exception. Instead of falling asleep, there is an increased alertness and clarity of mind; and a sense of calm and serenity fills your body.

As Thai Massage becomes more widely available, it still remains unregulated, so it is important to find a therapist who is both licensed and insured. This indicates that they have taken training at a reputable school, and are recognized by a governing board. The existing schools each have their own licensing requirements, while some municipalities require each therapist to obtain a license to practice within specific cities. The Association of Massage Therapists and Holistic Practitioners in Alberta is one of the first insurance providers to recognize the importance of this art and have paved the way for therapists from all over the country to begin to offer this therapy to the general public. As the interest in Thai Massage has grown, there is a growing demand for teachers. The founder of the Lotus Palm School in Montreal, Kam Thye Chow, is recognized across the continent and conducts workshops and seminars all over the country. He was one of the first teachers to bring this art to North America. Deanna Villa has opened a school and clinic called Thai Massage Toronto in 2004 to handle the flow of new students and clients. Through her school therapists are now able to be recognized by their own governing body (EBNMP) as this therapy continues to gain the popularity and recognition it deserves.

Interested in learning more about Thai Massage? There are courses available and lots of options. Look into taking a quick introductory session. Try sharing a weekend for two with someone you love and learn a vital and beautiful form of massage. Most of all, try it out for your self. See if it works for you. Enjoy the results.

At the core of Thai Massage is what the Buddhists call "*Metta*" which translates as "*Loving Kindness*". This creates a warm and caring environment for each and every being and provides a foundation for truly compassionate life.

On this journey through life, we always have the opportunity to find what touches our hearts and brings us joy. This is an important part of caring for ourselves and it brings us the ability to care for others. When we choose to liberate our bodies from tension and pain, we move more freely through the challenges that are presented to us.

We all choose our own way to wellness, and knowing that we have the opportunity to experience Thai Massage gives us a powerful tool to enhance our lives.

When the session is over, you may find yourself sitting with a warm cup of tea in your hands, perhaps looking out over the city as the snow falls on a winter day, or watching the bright sunlight filtering in through the windows. You can take the time to listen to the deep relaxation that fills your body and spirit. It was your first Thai Massage and it won't be the last.

For more information or to find a certified therapist in your area go to:

[www.thaimassagetoronto.com](http://www.thaimassagetoronto.com)

[www.lotuspalm.com](http://www.lotuspalm.com)