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THAI MASSAGE:
A health practice
perfected by
Buddhist monks



Massage: Helping Hands

Sleazy parlors are a thing of the past. Modern massage therapists have worked hard to rescue their field's reputation. Now 75 percent of physicians find it effective. Studies suggest it can relieve chronic pain, cut stress and boost the immune system. Which type's right for you?

■ **Acupressure.** Interested in acupuncture but afraid of the needles? This therapy uses finger pressure instead of pinpricks. Devotees claim it balances energy in the body, promoting health and reducing stress and fatigue. Japanese shiatsu is a popular variety.

■ **Craniocervical therapy.** This therapy employs a light

touch—no more than the weight of a nickel—on the patient's head and back. It's said to ease the movement of spinal fluid, releasing "blockages" supposedly caused by past traumas. Used for headaches, back pain and nervous disorders.

■ **Deep tissue massage.** Using firm strokes, therapists work slowly through layers of muscle to release built-up tension. Related techniques such as Roling address posture problems that cause chronic pain. May be more painful than other massage, but results can be dramatic.

■ **Reflexology.** Therapists stimulate points on the hands and feet that are believed to connect to internal organs via invisible energy channels. The

therapy is designed to relieve blockages in the body that ostensibly cause disease.

■ **Swedish massage.** Developed in the 19th century, this pioneering method of massage employs several basic hand movements to relax muscles, including kneading, tapping, circular pressure and shaking. It's said to improve blood flow, relieve sore joints and increase energy.

■ **Thai massage.** Can't decide between yoga and massage? This practice gives you both. A therapist guides the patient through stretches while applying gentle pressure to key energy points along the body. It increases flexibility, relieves muscle tension and may help with chronic pain.

—JOSH ULICK