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Fit to Be Thai Massaged

The International Spa Association calls it the "next big thing." A combination of assisted yoga, massage, and acupressure, Thai massage originated in Thailand 2,000 years ago. The massagee lies clothed, on a mat or thin mattress, while the masseur twists, stretches, and contorts the body to relieve stress, relax muscles, and loosen joints. Clients can choose a firm or gentle touch, but be warned that firm means exactly that. For me, candles and soft music softened the blows. Traditional doctors in Thailand prescribe the massage to treat arthritis and chronic pain. Because it's relatively new in the West, there aren't yet medical studies to back that up. I can attest it soothed sore shoulders and gave me moments of drool-inducing mellowness.

The key, as with any massage, is to find a reputable therapist -- one trained by a qualified human, not by a video or an online course. A local spa might make recommendations. Or send an E-mail to thaihealingalliance.com from its website for referrals. Be sure to mention any medical conditions before the massage (and check with your doc if you have worries). Also, you might want to bring a bib.— *Betsy Querna*