

ABDOMINAL SELF-MASSAGE

In Japanese, the Hara is the entire soft portion of the belly. It stretches from just below the diaphragm to the top of the pubic bone. This area in Asia is considered a person's vital center. Anatomically, it contains the Stomach and Intestines (Large and Small), the Liver and Spleen, and the Kidneys and Bladder, in fact, all the vital Organs of Oriental medicine except the Heart and Lungs. In traditional Japanese medicine, it is believed that a healthy Hara is the sign of and key to health in general.

Traditionally, the Hara's health is ascertained through palpation. Pain, lumps and bumps, abnormal muscular tension, abnormal pulsation, and hyper or hypotonicity may all be signs that the Internal Organs are unbalanced or diseased. A corollary of this is that, if this pain or other abnormal findings are relieved, the imbalance or disease of the Internal Organs these signify will simultaneously be relieved.

Happily, one can not only diagnose the balance and imbalance of the Organs by palpating the abdomen but one can directly treat these Organs and Bowels with nothing more than pressure applied with one's own hands. Many famous Japanese therapists, such as Kiyoshi Kato and Naoichi Kuzome, treat the full range of human disease primarily through *Hara Shiatsu* or abdominal massage.

One begins by lying on their back with their knees drawn up. If the feet are spread slightly apart, the knees can fall together in the center and hold themselves up without any further effort. Next one presses with the flats of the fingers of both hands under the right ribs. One begins pressing as one exhales. Continue to press and exhale to a count of six. When inhaling, move the fingers down and over to the sides of the rib cage and exhale and press again. Do this three times until one winds up pressing under the floating ribs at their sides.

Next, go back to the midline beneath the ribs and repeat this sequence moving to the left in three exhalations. During this first pass over the hypochondrium, the pressure should not be too strong. Now repeat this entire sequence two more times, each time pressing a little harder.

At first, one may experience pain, resistance, or tension pressing in under the ribs. This is common but is also a sign of hypochondrial congestion, mostly in the Liver and Gallbladder. As one continues over a period of weeks, this pain and tension will disappear and one's fingers will sink deeper under the ribs. This is quite important and has to do with the true meaning of being a hypochondriac.

The hypochondrium means the area below the ribs. In Chinese medicine, this area is the home of the Liver and Gallbladder. The Liver's main function in Chinese medicine, as stated above, is to govern smooth dispersal of the Qi and Blood. When the Liver's smooth dispersal function is healthy, peristalsis is normal and digestion is good. Also, one's mood will be even and light and one will have regular elimination and freedom from

depression. Therefore, one can see that just this first Hara Shiatsu move promoting the free flow of the Liver/ Gallbladder Qi can have a deeply healing effect.

Next, one positions their hands on their lower right abdomen next to their pelvic bone. With each exhalation, one presses down for a count of six. As one inhales, one moves up the abdomen until finally their hands are beneath the ribs again. One makes three passes up the abdomen on the right side. Anatomically this follows the course of the ascending colon.

Then, beginning at the solar plexus, one presses down the midline to just above the pubic bone. Likewise, one makes three other lines down the left abdomen moving from the center out to the sides. These passes down the left abdomen follow the course of the descending colon. One should repeat this entire sequence up the right and down the left sides of the abdomen three times, each time exerting a little more pressure.

Next, go back to any places where one felt special pain or resistance. As one exhales, exert pressure on these spots to the limits of one's tolerance but without torturing oneself. Often the same spots or areas will be sore day after day. But as one does this abdominal self-massage day by day, these areas will tend to become less sore and sensitive. Typically, in a relatively healthy person, after from two to four weeks of doing this regime daily, one's abdomen will be free from any such-specially reactive areas. This signals that incipient Stagnations within the Organs and Bowels have been relieved even before they may have given rise to any other signs and symptoms.

According to Matsumoto and Birch, if one finds an actual lump or mass in the abdomen, besides having this checked by a primary health care professional, one should not press directly on the center of such a lump. Rather, one should search for a sore or sensitive spot on the edge or periphery of the mass. It is here that pressure should be exerted.⁷

Finally, one returns to the right hypochondrium and again presses once three times out to the right and then from the solar plexus once three times out to the left. This concludes one's daily session of abdominal self-massage.

As stated above, after from two to four weeks of daily practice, the average person will find their abdomen has become painless and supple. This should be accompanied by better bowel movements, better appetite, and therefore better, more abundant energy. This entire procedure takes approximately 20 minutes. It can be performed directly upon arising or directly before bed. After the abdomen becomes pain free and normalized, one can do the massage every other or every few days. However, if one does not take care of oneself, after some time, the pain, lumps, and tension will return and these are signs that one's imbalance has also reestablished itself.

In traditional Japanese medicine, it is felt that sensitive spots, lumps, and tension in the abdomen are precursors to more serious disease. A person may otherwise be symptom

free but to many Japanese physicians, if there is some abnormality in the Hara as diagnosed by palpation, there is some incipient disease process taking shape. Therefore, if one eliminates these abnormalities, one can abort such disease processes even before other signs and symptoms arise.

Also as stated above, ten of the twelve Organs of traditional Oriental medicine are located in and can be accessed through massage of the Hara. Also, Meridians connected to four of the most important Organs, the Kidneys, Spleen, Stomach, and Liver traverse the soft abdomen and are directly affected by this abdominal massage.

One cannot easily massage their entire body, but one can easily massage their abdomen. Since the abdomen or Hara is the Root of the entire body, massaging it massages the Root of all the rest. If the root of a plant is healthy, the leaves and branches will likewise tend to flourish.



Step 3. Now go back and press any reactive or tender areas.

