

BEAUTY

# Meet the Weirdest Wellness Craze of the Moment: Organ Massage



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Photographed by Francesco Scavullo, *Vogue*, April 1975

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Note to self: Next time you go in for an organ massage, don't show up in a super-snug high-waisted skirt. This is what occupies my mind as I lie

faceup on a table inside the tranquil Lower East Side sanctuary of healer Ramesh Narine. Working in near silence, he hasn't said anything about the fleur-de-lis-print Suno garment that is obstructing access to all that lies south of my bellybutton. He moves his fingertips along the portion of abdomen available to him, pausing every few inches to press in a little deeper. The sensation is not painful, nor is it pleasurable. "What organs are you aiming for now?" I squawk, trying to recall my high school biology diagrams. In response, he instructs me to focus on steadying my breath.

Narine is among the 24,000 trained practitioners of Visceral Manipulation, as organ massage is technically called. An offshoot of craniosacral therapy, the popular healing practice that involves light touching of the head and neck in order to aid spinal flow and release tightness, visceral manipulation focuses on the organs contained in the torso, where our bodies also hold tension. Through gentle stimulation, the practice claims to help with a host of issues including sleep, mood, digestion, pain, trauma, and stress. A study earlier this year reported that it can help treat children with chronic constipation, and a 2013 article in the *Journal of the American Osteopathic Association* found that it may help heal and can also prevent abdominal adhesions post-surgery. My quest is more open ended: Offer me a chance to dial up my general wellness quotient—I'll take it.

I'm not the only one curious enough to give it a try. The morning before my maiden manipulation, I attended an event in Soho where I ran into the model Carolyn Murphy, who lives at the forefront of the wellness movement. "You're going to love it!" she said when I told her about my

plans. “I’ve been doing it for four of five months. First I saw this guy in Los Angeles and he said my liver was gummy from a detox I was doing, so we worked on that. And then I had it done in New York and it was like a massage of my small intestines. Don’t be scared—it feels wonderful.”

A little further digging at my office computer revealed that the technique was invented in the mid-’80s by a French osteopath, named Jean-Pierre Barral, who zeroed in on the ways the vital viscera (e.g., liver, kidney, small intestine) can set off trouble in other parts of the body, especially the spine. Working in a dissection lab, he experimented on cadavers and concluded that the connective tissue around our organs can tighten and trigger a cascade of physical dysfunctions.

Later that afternoon, tucked away in Narine’s cozy corner of the universe, I’m aiming to rectify my own set of modern maladies. A heavy workload and an inability to sleep past 4:45 in the morning have left me feeling—and certainly looking—frazzled. “I could use some serious help calming down and not worrying so much,” I tell him. He nods warmly and begins “smudging” me by waving burning sage all over my body. He then rests his hand on my head and closes his eyes shamanically. “Have you been in a car crash?” he asks. I tell him I have not, prompting him to add, “I’m having a hard time getting a read on you.”

My spiritual feelings slightly sore, I lay down on the table and we get to work. My muscles slowly loosen as Narine’s hands make their way around my abdomen. His touch is so delicate, I peek at times to confirm that he is, in fact, making skin-to-skin contact. Just as I’m wondering if this is a New Age scam, my stomach chimes in with a glorious gurgle.

“That never happens!” I tell him. He seems pleased, and not at all surprised. “The intention is to wake up a little communication between the gut and the brain,” he says, gliding his fingers toward my left side and resuming his soft touching. At some point, he hooks his fingers under my waistline and continues on my lower abdomen. Ninety minutes after first walking through Narine’s door, I emerge back on the street feeling as if I’d just woken from a sublimely pleasant dream.

That evening, though, my stomach continues making noises and I feel slight discomfort. I sleep through the night, yet the sensation intensifies the following day, and I email Narine to ask if it’s possible that our session brought this on. His reply comes quickly, and he sounds excited to hear my report. “That is an experience of the organs communicating with one another and unwinding,” he tells me. “You may continue to perceive sensation for a few weeks, with varying degrees of volume.”

Still unsure about what may or may not have happened in his chambers, I call Lisa Ganjhu, D.O., a gastroenterologist and associate clinical professor at NYU Langone Medical Center in New York. She agrees there was likely a cause and effect, and doesn’t sound remotely worried about any of it. “Everyone knows you get better by being touched,” she tells me. “It starts the healing process. If a baby has colic, you touch her belly or back, and it helps her calm down. It’s the same principle with adults.” When I ask about my specific pain, she hypothesizes that the massage stimulated my gastrointestinal tract and set off contractions. I haven’t heard this word applied to my body since I gave birth two years ago, and ask her if there is cause for concern. “So long as you’re working with an

experienced therapist who knows when to stop, it shouldn't be a problem."

It's been three weeks now, and the discomfort has not returned. A beauty editor friend remarked that my skin is looking well, and I've experienced only one crack-of-dawn wake up since my treatment, which is a tectonic shift as far as I'm concerned. I haven't booked another organ massage appointment yet, but should another sleepless night occur, I'm ready: I just bought another Suno skirt—this time with room at the waist.

<http://www.vogue.com/article/visceral-manipulation-organ-massage-sky-ting-ramesh-narine-sleep-nervous-system>