

# Chinese Pediatric Massage: Background

In the past two decades, traditional Chinese healing therapies have taken strong root in the U.S. Acupuncture, herbology, and massage are increasingly utilized by people interested in alternative methods of medicine and self care. Typically these healing arts have focused on adults; however, there is one specialty within Chinese medicine which applies specifically to infants and children. Chinese Pediatric Massage (xiao er tui na) takes all of the principles of Chinese medicine, adapts them for the particular energetic characteristics of children, and uses simple massage techniques as a means of influencing energetic balance. Through the simple, less invasive technique of touch, the sophisticated and holistic Chinese approach to healing can be used for children.

Currently used in many of the Traditional Chinese Medical facilities in China today, pediatric massage is an important component of responding to common childhood conditions and maintaining good health. Like the other therapeutic techniques of Chinese medicine, it has grown into its present form after many centuries of development.



## Applications

Chinese Pediatric Massage is capable of influencing a child's energetic flow in the same way acupuncture is used with adults. However, because there are no needles, there is less resistance and fewer side effects from the treatment. It is a useful therapy for children from birth to approximately 12 years old, although it is mainly used for children under 6 years old. Usually, sometime between 6 and 12 years, a child's energetic system begins to mature and the therapy needs to be adjusted accordingly.

Massage is one way to utilize the complete system of Chinese medicine to promote good health and healing in children. While acupuncture and herbs can be used, massage is particularly appropriate for children for several reasons.



- 1) Children's energy is very accessible. Relative to adults, children have very few barriers or defenses in place. Therefore treatment requires less invasive techniques, less resistance, and fewer side effects.
- 2) Massage involves the very personal, communicative and bonding process of touch. Using hands to feel, touch, and massage a child can result in a better treatment response and bonding process.
- 3) Massage can be used preventively to maintain good health, as a primary therapy for simple conditions, or as an adjunctive therapy to other types of medical treatments. Also, massage can be done at home (travelling or elsewhere) providing an ongoing process to support the child generally, or for specific conditions.

## Indications

Massage can be used for a large variety of pediatric conditions, both acute and chronic. Examples of simple, acute conditions which respond to massage are: common cold, constipation, cough, diarrhea, poor digestion, fever, general health care, headache, sore throat, teething, and vomiting.

In addition, some chronic conditions may also respond to massage. Examples of chronic conditions include: abdominal distension and pain, asthma, bedwetting, bronchitis, chicken pox, colic, convulsions, dysentery, earache, hives, jaundice, measles, mumps, night crying, pneumonia, rubella, and whooping cough.

It is important to remember that in some situations a correct assessment and treatment plan must be made by a qualified health care practitioner. In difficult cases, massage may be used in conjunction with other types of therapy.

## Massage Treatment

A pediatric massage consists of working points selected according to the assessment, beginning with the fingers and hands, forearms, torso (front and back) feet, legs and head. The techniques and amount of time massaging each point varies according to the desired therapeutic effect.

Massage mediums, such as sesame oil, are used to protect the skin and for therapeutic effect.

Generally, each point will be massaged for 20-40 seconds. An average treatment will last approximately 15-20 minutes once the assessment is made. While these treatments are generally shorter in duration than adult treatments, they are repeated with more frequency. This is due to the quickly changing nature of the child and/or the condition. A serious acute condition (such as asthma or high fever) may require treatment three times per day. A less serious condition (diarrhea or vomiting) may require treatment once per day. A chronic condition may require treatment every other day. The specifics of the treatment plan and frequency are dependent on the individual child.

## Differences from Adults

Even though pediatric massage is based on the same energetic principles and theories used for adults, it has evolved in slightly different ways. This is natural because children are not simply smaller versions of adults. Infants begin life with functioning yet immature structural, physiological, AND energetic systems. The younger the child, the more immature the system compared to an adult. While the same general energetic processes apply between children and adults, there are some differences which must be accounted for in pediatric practice. These differences can be seen in theory, diagnosis, points, and techniques.



## CPM: Usefulness in the West

At a time when many people in the U.S. are exploring alternatives to the Western medical model, Chinese pediatric massage offers a way to expand the scope and quality of children's health care.

**Holistic Approach** - Pediatric massage is one part of the sophisticated and holistic system of Chinese medicine which can be used to help maintain good health as well as treat illness.

**Energetic Perspective** - Chinese pediatric massage offers the opportunity to work with conditions from a different perspective, which may provide an effective method of treating some pediatric conditions.

**Earlier Intervention** - By utilizing the Chinese energetic approach, conditions of imbalance can be noticed and treated earlier, which usually means a simpler and shorter duration of treatment. Dealing with conditions at earlier stages may preclude the necessity of using stronger methods later, particularly antibiotics.

**Ease of Application** - Learning to use pediatric massage is relatively easy, which allows parents and caregivers to be active participants in the healing process. This also allows parents to notice signs and symptoms of imbalance earlier and take corrective steps sooner. The massage techniques are less invasive than many therapies and also have less side effects.

**Range of Application** - Pediatric massage allows for a wide range of application. Parents can use massage preventively, to maintain good health, to treat simple conditions, or in conjunction with professional therapy.

## Conclusion

The healing arts from China have a long and proven history. Many adults in the U.S. are experiencing the benefits of utilizing these qi cultivation and healing principles. Chinese pediatric massage offers a simple and practical way of expanding those benefits to include children, too.