



# Belly bodywork

*Have you ever suffered from abdominal aches, gas, constipation or diarrhoea? Tummy troubles can make life miserable. For a smiling stomach consider a Chi Nei Tsang treatment.*

Words CAROLINE ROBERTSON

The umbilicus is our original source of energy from our mother. As babies, we're nourished through our navel, which is also a purification portal. This central core of our body is a pivotal point of biological balance and an entrance to holistic healing. The belly button is like the hub of a wheel with physical and energetic spokes radiating through our whole body. When the wheel is aligned the rest of the body runs smoothly. When there are blocks, knots and tension in our abdomen it affects us emotionally, physically and energetically.

Science now acknowledges the amazing role the abdomen plays in overall health. A healthy microbiome, optimal organs and a balanced enteric nervous system are essential aspects to wellbeing. Unfortunately, a bad gut feeling is becoming the norm these days. Issues such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), small intestinal bacterial overgrowth (SIBO) and gastro-oesophageal reflux disease (GORD) are more prevalent than ever. Abdominal massage is gaining advocates as many benefit from belly bodywork in conjunction with other therapeutic support.

## Your second brain

"Your belly is a power plant, like the power plant in a city. When there is a problem the whole city suffers. The essence of life is in the belly," declares Jutta Kellenberger.

Do you get butterflies in your stomach when nervous, lose your appetite when depressed or feel burning in the stomach when stressed? Blame it on your second brain. Long before medicine discovered the gut-brain axis as a vital network linking the enteric and central nervous systems, Ayurveda and Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) valued the gut as a second brain. Known as the *nabhi* in Ayurveda, *hara* in shiatsu, *swadisthana chakra* in yoga and the *dan tien* in TCM, this region three finger-widths below the belly button whirls a vortex of emotions, energy and potential

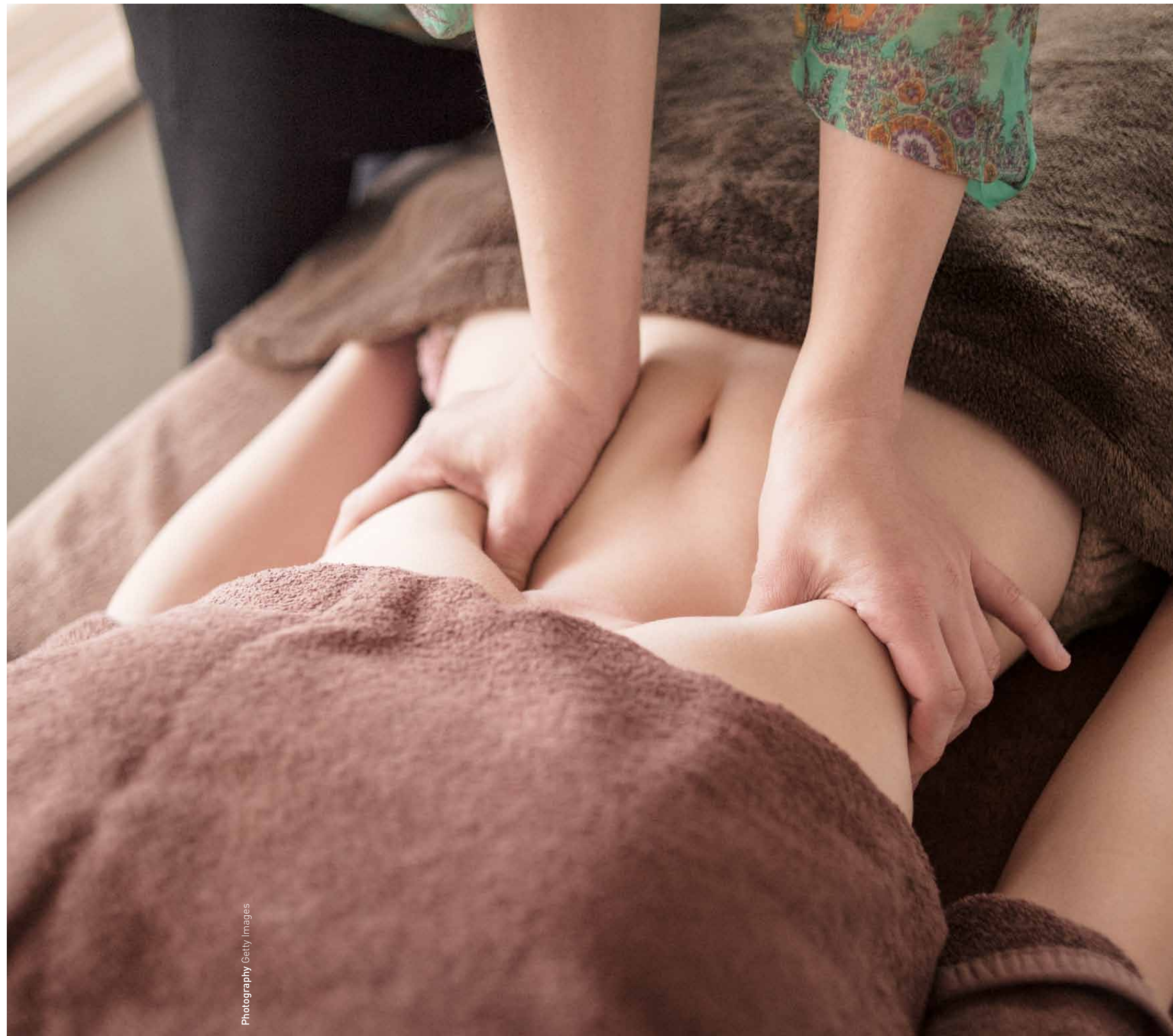
toxins. Stoking this alchemical cauldron unleashes an elixir of energy that fosters health and happiness.

Reciprocal communication between the upper brain and the abdominal lower brain orchestrates motor functions, gastric secretions, neurotransmitter production, endocrine actions, immunity and more. There are up to 600 million neurons in the enteric nervous system which interact with trillions of bacteria and use over 30 neurotransmitters, including 95 per cent of the body's serotonin. Additionally, the digestive organs are constantly keeping our body balanced through digestion, assimilation and elimination. It only takes a few days without evacuating for us to realise how a healthy colon is crucial for all functions.

## Gut feeling

The goal of belly bodywork such as Chi Nei Tsang (CNT) and visceral manipulation is to re-establish a coherent brain-body connection. Treating our sensitive abdominal area also acts as somatic psychotherapy, clearing unresolved emotions. Therapists identify the psychological correlation to physical gut issues and facilitate mental healing through manual and energetic bodywork. "The majority of patients with anxiety and depression will also have alterations of their GI [gastrointestinal] function," Dr Emeran Mayer, professor of medicine, physiology and psychiatry at the University of California, told *The New York Times*.

According to Taoist healing, each organ stores specific emotions like a garbage bin. Our abdomen is a barometer for our feelings. Have you ever felt a funny feeling in the pit of your stomach, sinking sadness, a fire of rising rage, knots of stress, churning indecision, gnawing desire and flutters of excitement? These subtle vibrations can turn into physical illness. For example, unresolved anger accumulated in the liver may manifest as low liver function.



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## Digest emotions

### ~ Heart emotional energy

Negative: Disconnection, impatience, mania, callousness and hate.

Positive: Connection, compassion, kindness, joy and love.

### ~ Lung emotional energy

Negative: Apathy, depression, grief and hopelessness.

Positive: Courage, determination, enthusiasm and energy.

### ~ Liver and gallbladder emotional energy

Negative: Anger, arrogance, resentment and vengefulness.

Positive: Acceptance, fairness, forgiveness and kindness.

### ~ Spleen and stomach emotional energy

Negative: Anxiety, worry and weakness.

Positive: Confidence, capability and trust.

### ~ Kidney and bladder emotional energy

Negative: Fear, defensiveness, withdrawal and coldness.

Positive: Faith, gentleness, relaxation and groundedness.

## What is Chi Nei Tsang?

"... CNT is directly massaging the organs in order to balance their energies. When you practise CNT you are able to increase the energy and blood flow to and from the organs," explains Master Mantak Chia.

CNT is a profound body therapy that deeply impacts the body, mind and energy field. My first CNT session with Jutta Kellenberger, universal healing Tao senior instructor ([juttakellenberger.com](http://juttakellenberger.com)), was unforgettably cathartic. My whole body felt free and charged with fresh energy. In the following days my digestion was better than ever, with a chronic pain in the splenic flexure disappearing. Inspired by this healing experience, I've continued to incorporate CNT into my self-healing and client sessions.

China's mystical White Cloud monks developed CNT to unblock energy for enlightenment. The ancient modality was almost extinct until Taoist Master Mantak Chia ([mantakchia.com](http://mantakchia.com)) revived and systematised the traditional science. Chia was so impressed that his immobile uncle could walk after one session with Dr Mui Yim Wattana that he became his student. CNT means restoring internal organs' life-force flow. It applies TCM, qigong and tai chi principles of the five elements, acupressure points and meridians. This releases blocks, allowing

a health-giving qi to flow through the mind and body.

## Five levels of Chi Nei Tsang

- 1 Organ detox massage: Releasing blockages from organs
- 2 Chasing the winds: Opening the wind gates to release sick gas
- 3 Tok-sen: Muscle, tendon and meridian massage
- 4 Karsai Nei Tsang: Balancing reproductive area
- 5 Live pulse: Activating 52 pulses in the body to regenerate energy

## Bellyfull of benefits

Clinical evidence suggests CNT can shift stubborn issues such as acid reflux, anxiety, back pain, bloating, constipation, cramps, diarrhea, endometriosis, erectile dysfunction, headaches, indigestion, low libido, obesity, period pain, ovarian cysts, sciatica, stress and disconnection from body.

## Belly rub

Are you ready to reconnect to your core and release tension and toxins in your hard-working belly? We instinctively stroke our stomach when we want to stoke digestion or settle abdominal discomfort. Though self-massage isn't as deep as a practitioner session, you can facilitate digestion and evacuation effectively.



Take time out to treat your tummy to a little TLC with these massage moves. Prepare a massage oil or lotion, a hot towel or heat pack and pillows or bolster. Adding dilute essential oils to the massage oil or lotion can enhance the therapeutic effect. Essential oils of fennel, peppermint or spearmint help to ease cramps, gas and spasms. Castor oil can ease pain from constipation, endometriosis or fibroids. Lemon balm is excellent for anxiety, diarrhoea or shingles. Ginger can aid digestion and nausea. Adding a pinch of asafoetida to warm ghee or coconut oil is excellent for infant colic.

CNT practitioner Arianna Gouveia suggests, "Go in with a sense of listening." Here are a few more tips when it comes to treating your tummy.

- ✔ Ensure you haven't eaten for two hours.
- ✔ Have a warm shower or bath.
- ✔ When you feel pain, smile into it and continue with same pressure until it softens. If you feel hard resistance then massage with small circles.
- ✔ Lie on your back in a comfortable, quiet room.
- ✔ Rest your lower legs on a bolster or pillows.
- ✔ Place a warm wet cloth or heat pack over your abdomen.
- ✔ Settle your palms on your belly and send a smile to it.
- ✔ Inhaling feel the belly rise and exhaling feel the belly fall for three rounds.
- ✔ Remove the warm cloth or heat pack.
- ✔ Apply warm oil or lotion to the abdomen.
- ✔ Place index finger in navel and shake up and down around the whole circumference.
- ✔ Using all your fingertips apply long swirling gentle circular strokes around

the belly button creating bigger circles outward in a clockwise direction.

- ✔ Place fingers of both hands at navel applying small circles, now around navel in a clockwise direction.
- ✔ Place fingers above right hip bone and do small circles straight up to the ribcage, across the ribcage and down the descending colon.
- ✔ Placing index and middle finger of right hand on belly button and index and middle fingers of left hand on top, massage in small anticlockwise spirals up the central channel from navel to solar plexus.
- ✔ Repeat spirals down from the solar plexus to navel.
- ✔ Placing all fingers under the diaphragm, pull down towards the navel three times.
- ✔ Placing index and middle finger of right hand below belly button and index and middle fingers of left hand on top, massage in small anticlockwise spirals down the central channel from navel to pubic bone then back up to the navel.
- ✔ With the fingers in the same position, spiral down from under the left side of the ribs to the pubic bone.
- ✔ Repeat from right side of the ribs to the pubic bone.
- ✔ Placing hands above pubic bone, inhale then exhale and dig three fingers as deep as possible. Hold for five seconds.
- ✔ Repeat this to the left side of the groin, the right side, under the right ribs and left ribs.
- ✔ Place palms over the heart, smile into the heart and feel the heartbeat. Stroke a love heart shape with both sweeping palms terminating on groin.
- ✔ Sweep palms up to heart. Smile to the heart. Laugh gently. Inhaling say "thank" and exhaling say "you." Laugh gently.

## Navel-gazing

According to CNT, the shape of the navel shows areas of abdominal tension. Essentially, a pull, bulge or rigidity in an area of the umbilicus suggests stress in related organs or tissues. If you observe one of the following, it may indicate an organic issue.

- ✔ Downward pull towards the groin : Issues in the solar plexus or diaphragm.
- ✔ Upward pull: Potential problems with constipation, cough, heart, intestine or respiration.
- ✔ Left pull: Potential ascending colon and right kidney issues.
- ✔ Right pull: Potential left kidney, pancreas and spleen issues.
- ✔ Upper left pull: Potential issues with digestion, spleen, stomach, right hip and right leg.
- ✔ Upper right pull: Potential problems with colon, gall bladder, left hip, left leg and liver.
- ✔ Lower left pull: Potential issues with gall bladder, liver, right kidney, left leg and lower back.
- ✔ Lower right pull: Left kidney, lower back, right leg and spleen.

## Contraindications

**CNT is contraindicated in the following conditions:**

- ✔ Abdominal aortic aneurysm
- ✔ Cancer
- ✔ Gastric banding
- ✔ Malignant tumour
- ✔ Menstruation
- ✔ Presence of a pacemaker or IUD
- ✔ Recent abdominal surgery

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## 5 primary benefits to Chi Nei Tsang

- 1 It connects one with the root causation and cues ways to resolution.**
- 2 It restructures and strengthens the body by aligning the organs and visceral tissues hence reducing pain.**
- 3 It detoxifies by stimulating circulation, mobilising lymph, freeing impinged nerves, activating immunity and clearing stagnation.**
- 4 It clears accumulated emotions.**
- 5 It can accelerate healing from injury or trauma, including obstetrical and surgical issues.**