

# THE EXPRESS

THURSDAY 25TH MARCH 1999

## fad of the ... Champissage

Discovering the secret of Stroking

ZOE DARE HALL test-drives  
Quick-fix head massage technique



Champissage is the Indian art of head massage. It's the quick fix treatment: anytime anywhere and you don't even have to take your clothes off. This, says my instructor Narendra Mehta, makes it a good way to introduce men to massage. I didn't think they could care less about stripping off but he should know.

He arrived in Britain 25 years ago and, burdened by new stresses of living in London, went in search of head massage, a centuries-old Indian therapy, to relay him, only to realise no one offered it. "When I went for what therapists called 'full body massage', they would get as far as the neck and stop. They told me they did not learn to massage the head because if you caused any damage, the client would sue." Mehta concluded it was time set up his own champissage service (taken from the name from the Hindu word for head massage, champi) and returned to India to learn.

Now, champissage is taking off in Britain. MP's do it in the House of Commons, BBC bosses get it subsidised and companies such as American Express get it in the house. Mehta is soon to launch champissage in America, through actress Demi Moore is already a devotee, using it to soothe her head after it was shaved for her role in *GI Jane*.

Techniques vary, as traditionally the art is passed down the generations and adapted to

suit personal taste. Mehta, blind since the age of one and with a heightened sense of touch, has developed his own style to suit the Western way of fast living. “ My criteria are that you need to be sitting up rather than lying down, you can use any chair, and remain fully clothed. I don’t use any oils. That way, you can take the therapy to the client so it doesn’t eat up valuable time in their day. They can have the massage sitting at their desk, surrounded by people, and reap the same benefits.” It’s true, oily hair in the office would be something of an inconvenience and a dry massage is equally relaxing. “We do use some oils to assist with complaints such as hair loss or dandruff”, Mehta explained. “It is particularly good for men in their 20’s and 30’s who are worried about thinning hair.

“When I was growing up, my mother would give me head massages twice a week, using coconut oil to cool my head in the heat and keep my hair shiny and tidy. In India, the main purposed of head massage is grooming but it has the side effect of relaxation. “ Men go the barber for head massages. Women – sisters, aunts, grandmothers – all mas- sage each other to keep their long, lustrous hair in good condition. They add a few drops of sandalwood to make it grow and henna to make it shine.” Having arrived at this West End office straight from work in the Friday night London rush hour, my tension levels were perceptibly high.

First, Mehta attacked my shoulder and neck muscles, causing sharp bursts of pain but with the aim of stimulating circulation and ridding the body of waste material. “ You have neglected shoulders,” he told me, before moving on to my head using a series of tech- niques with names such as “windscreen wipers” (the most disruptive to the hair-do), “rain- drops” (rapid tapping above the ears) and “hailstones” (like rain-drops, only heavier). “this is the nice one”, Mehta announced, “stroking.” He dragged his hands down my hair and halfway down my back. Incidentally, head massage is a technique he recommends for lovers. The head plays a major part in Indian ritual. It you visit a guru, he will put his hand on your head. And in a marriage ceremony, the parents of the bride and groom will do likewise throughout the blessing, “to pick up the good healing energy,” explained Mehta.

“Stroking someone’s head is very important. It makes them feel they are loved. The head is the area of the crown chakra, which gives positive healing to the rest of the body,” In this curious carrot and stick treatment, the lovely stroking was followed by hair tugging. “ Your hair is becoming longer,” he said. “In fact, it’s falling out.” He was joking. Then it was tie to move my scalp, flick my ears and prod my jaw (apparently revealing a huge lump of tension) before ending with five blissful minutes of facial massage. My muscles felt far more malleable, my shoulders had dropped a couple of inches and, thanks to the sooting final minutes, my whole body and mind were more relaxed. Even facing the West End in the rush hour did not faze me.