

# ***The Times of India***

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## **Champi days hair again**

*'Indian Head Massage, Popular In UK, Spreading To Europe, US'*

*by Neelam Raaj/TNN*

New Delhi: Remember Johnny Walker singing the champi's badey, badey gun in Guru Dutt's *Pyaasa*? Now, everyone from stressed-out executives to celebs like Geri Halliwell and Mel C is heading for this sybaritic pleasure. Champissage—adequately French-sounding to befit its new, hip status—is a gentler version of what your typical 'Italian saloon' back home dishes out. No pummelling and banging with oil running into your eyes but plenty of kneading, heel rolls and tabla playing (drum-like movement).

"It's becoming the favourite lunch-time fix for harried executives who want a quick stress-buster," says Lorraine, a trained London-based practitioner who goes to offices to give her champis. No undressing, no oil and no need to lie down either. "It takes just 30 minutes and some of my clients even hit upon a solution to a pressing problem while I work on their head, shoulders, neck and face," she says.

Offices, shopping malls, airports and even on board intercontinental airliners, the 'massage' is spreading far and wide. Narendra Mehta, whose London Centre of Champissage has trained over 2,000 people in the art of champi, vouches for its popularity. "What sparked the idea was when I couldn't find a barber to give me as good a head massage as I got back home in Mumbai. I returned to India to learn the technique from hairdressers, men on the beach and ayurvedic doctors. Many, many massages later, I developed my 'championship' and then started training courses," says Mehta, who lost his sight when he was one.

Today, he has a book to his credit, centres in Tokyo and Toronto, an A-list clientele and students who've gone on to become accredited tutors in Australia, Japan and Sweden.

"The Indian head massage is one of the most popular complementary therapies in the UK and it's slowly getting followers in Europe and the US as well," adds Mehta.

At swish spas across the UK, the humble 'tel-maalish' has got that ayurvedic touch. Calmia, a holistic day spa in central London that boasts of regulars like Annie Lennox and Denise van Outen, includes the champi in its signature 'complete stress release treatment' as well as an add-on. "The technique our therapists use is based on the traditional shirobhanga and the aim is to refresh the mind and body, relieve tension and fatigue. A blend of oils like sandalwood and vetiver is used to lubricate and stimulate hair growth," says Clare Forde, PR and Communications Manager.

So why isn't the champi headed for bigger things back home? Colin Gary Hall, director of destination spa Ananda in the Himalayas, says it's marketing that's done the trick. "The West has packaged the Indian head massage well and that's why it's become so massive in the UK," says Colin, who has done a course in the therapy as well. Abroad, therapists are trained to be gentle with those who have neck and back ailments while the neighbourhood barber twists and thumps at will. Of course, the champissage has a price to match: 20 pounds for a 15-minute session!