



American  
Organization for  
Bodywork  
Therapies of  
Asia

## FAQ's About ABT Treatments

### Q: *What is Asian Bodywork Therapy (ABT)?*

A: ABT (as it is often abbreviated) is a useful term for the major forms of therapeutic bodywork that originated in China, Japan, Korea and Thailand. All are rooted in the principles of Chinese Medicine and involve the art of harmonizing Qi (bioenergy system) through the same meridian system and acupoints shared with acupuncture. The most popular forms of ABT in the USA include various styles of Shiatsu (Japan), Acupressure, Tuina (China), and Nuad Bo 'Rarn (Thailand). Medical Qigong includes a variety of "off-the-body" techniques that can be helpful for those clients who are uncomfortable with touch.

### Q: *How do I find a qualified therapist?*

A: The AOBTA website, [www.aobta.org](http://www.aobta.org), has a Professional Directory that enables you to find a qualified therapist or instructor near you. You can also search the directory on the National Certification Commission for Acupuncture and Oriental Medicine (NCCAOM) website, [www.nccaom.org](http://www.nccaom.org), for a nationally certified Diplomate of Asian Bodywork Therapy, indicated with the credentials of **Dipl. ABT (NCCAOM)**. Qualified ABT therapists do not use terms like "Oriental Massage" or "Asian Massage".

### Q: *How can I find out which form of ABT is best for me?*

A: The forms of ABT are generally very adaptable to the needs, preferences and concerns of the individual client. Most forms of ABT involve subtle stretching, range of motion, joint mobilization, palpation techniques and pressure that is applied along meridians and on acupoints for the purpose of influencing the Qi (bioenergy system) flow in the body. Various techniques are used to assess the strength and balance of the Qi (bioenergy system) during a treatment session

– such as viewing the tongue, taking the pulse, and palpating areas of the abdomen (Hara) and the back. Please feel free to talk to the therapist about your needs, concerns and preferences... it may be more important to focus on finding a therapist that is a good match than to be concerned about which specific ABT form is best for you.

**Q: *What can I expect during a session?***

A: Clients are advised to wear loose comfortable clothing, such as t-shirts, yoga pants, sweat pants, etc. Almost all forms of ABT are given with the client clothed and without lotions or oils. Sessions can be given on a table, chair, futon mat, wheelchair, and hospital bed or as a combination – depending on the technique or the client's needs or preferences. After discussing the intake form, the therapist will typically devote about an hour to the session. The therapist may also share his/her assessments and make therapeutic lifestyle suggestions.

**Q: *What are the major differences between Tuina and Shiatsu?***

A: Tuina is Chinese based and commonly practiced in major hospitals in China as part of Acupuncture and Orthopedics. Shiatsu is a sophisticated form of ancient Acupressure that has been modernized through the prism of Japanese Medicine during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Shiatsu involves different systems of assessment that guide the therapist's specific choice of techniques, meridians and acupoints for each client. Many different variations of Shiatsu have evolved in Japan, the USA, and Europe in the last three decades. You can find definitions of the various ABT forms on the AOBTA website.

**Q: *Can you explain Qi energy, meridians, and acupoints?***

A: Qi is the body's natural bioenergetic system that is organized in pathways related to our anatomy, physiology, associated emotions, thoughts, and psyche. The meridians form a network – like a system of roads, highways, and country lanes. Acupoints are found at the major junctions, crossroads, overpasses, bus stops, and traffic lights. The subtle art of assessment and treatment requires the selection of specific meridians and acupoints that can be used to unblock traffic jams and enhance the free flow of traffic that results in homeostasis.

Freeing those energy blocks and moving towards homeostasis can help to prevent or treat both acute and chronic conditions and health concerns.

**Q: *Does ABT use needles to move those energy blocks?***

A: No. But those acupuncturists fully trained in ABT can offer clients a therapeutic combination of needling and ABT techniques. ABT is especially appropriate for clients who are needle shy. Acupuncture training and ABT training overlap in medical philosophies, and theoretical and practical instruction – but Acupuncture requires many more hours of theoretical, practical, and clinical training.

**Q: *Isn't ABT just another form of Massage Therapy?***

A: No. ABT training is totally different from Massage Therapy training – which makes them separate professions. The ABT profession requires a minimum of 500 hours of theoretical and practical instruction in a specific ABT form in order to become an AOBTA® Certified Practitioner. The only parallel training between the ABT and Massage Therapy professions is the required 100 hours of Anatomy and Physiology, CPR, Ethics, and Business. The *US Department of Education* clearly defines ABT and Massage Therapy as separate professions with defined educational curricular differences.

[see pg. 369 at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2002/2002165.pdf> with reference #51.3501 for Massage Therapy and reference #51.3502 for ABT.]

**Q: *Why do some ABT therapists need to have a Massage License to practice?***

A: Some states have chosen not to recognize ABT and Massage Therapy as separate professions in their licensing procedures and require ABT therapists to be fully trained as Massage Therapists in order to be licensed (such as New York). Other states (like Texas) require ABT therapists to have the nationally certified credential of Dipl. ABT (NCCAOM) or the professional status of AOBTA Certified Practitioner – unless they work within a Massage Therapy practice, in which case they are then required to be licensed Massage

Therapists. Other states may require Massage Therapists to be licensed but not ABT therapists. Each state has its own licensing requirements and it's useful to check both the national and state requirements when searching for fully trained and qualified therapists. Avoid those practitioners that claim to practice ABT when they've only had a few hours of training in ABT techniques. There is a big difference between fully trained ABT therapists and those therapists that simply incorporate some ABT techniques into their massage or bodywork practice.

**Q: *Do I need to be ill to seek out ABT treatments?***

A: Certainly not! Many people use ABT as part of their regular fitness and wellness regimen. It is a very effective preventive wellness therapy. Some will use ABT as a quick tune-up when they are feeling out of balance, stressed or experiencing minor symptoms. Others seek out ABT during a life-crisis to cope with their transition, grief, or trauma. Often, clients will wait until they are experiencing chronic symptoms (such as pain, headaches, depression, intestinal disorders, menstrual symptoms, allergies, etc.) to seek out ABT treatments. Sometimes, people will seek out ABT treatments when they have become frustrated with conventional medical failures at easing their conditions and restoring their health.

**Q: *Can I get ABT treatments while I am pregnant?***

A: Yes. Talk to the therapist about his/her experience and comfort in working with pregnant clients. It can be especially helpful to find therapists that specialize in ABT for pregnancy.

**Q: *Can I receive ABT treatments if am taking medications?***

A: Yes. It's important to list your medications on the client intake form and to discuss those medications with the therapist.

**Q: *Can I receive ABT treatments if I have cancer?***

A: Yes. ABT treatments can be very helpful in easing the side effects of both cancer and treatment. It can also be very helpful at rebuilding health after cancer and surgery or radiation treatment

procedures. Talk with the therapist about his/her experience, comfort level, and ability to be supportive when working with cancer and your treatment decisions. Survivors deserve a therapist that can support their individual journeys.

**Q: *What if I am getting chemotherapy?***

A: ABT treatments can help to ease the side effects of chemotherapy (including pain, nausea, vomiting, depression, fear, anxiety, fatigue, achiness, neuropathy, digestive distress, etc.). ABT can also be very helpful post-chemo to help rebuild the immune system, strength, and stamina.

**Q: *Is ABT helpful as a palliative care treatment?***

A: Yes, it is especially helpful in easing physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual pain and suffering. It is very effective at enhancing quality of life.

**Q: *Is ABT safe for children?***

A: Absolutely! Many ABT forms include special pediatric techniques. Offering children ABT treatments can be a wonderful way to prompt early self-care and health awareness.

