

LIFE

I feel like a child when I'm making wedding dolls, and I feel very happy looking at the finished result of dolls dressed in wedding garments

IRENE LAW, WEDDING DOLL DRESSMAKER > CULTURE B11

WELL-BEING



BodyTalk practitioner and instructor Angie Tourani works on her patient, Anmol Nanani, in Central. Photo: Jonathan Wong

Wisdom behind an unlikely treatment

BodyTalk is a holistic therapy grounded in the belief that people can use their 'innate wisdom' to heal themselves more effectively than technology can. We put it to the test

Anthea Rowan
life@scmp.com

BodyTalk is a therapy that I had always dismissed as woo-woo medicine. How could talk treat a physiological ailment? But I have friends who swear by it, friends who are not woo-woo at all, who are grounded, competent, common-sense women.

"It feels a bit like your body has been defragmented, put back together again," one friend told me. "Things 'fit better' afterwards."

I liked the idea of that – of being undone and put back together again. So, with that in mind, I attended my first remote (isn't everything these days?) session with Angie Tourani, who is in Hong Kong.

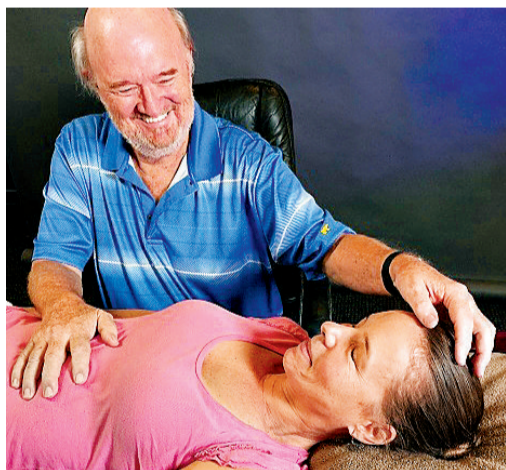
Tourani trained in BodyTalk when her children were young. "I was tired of giving them antibiotics for recurring ear infections which were compromising my daughter's hearing," she says. When doctors recommended surgery to install tubes to prevent infections and hearing loss, she looked for a natural, non-invasive alternative.

Equipped with the fundamentals of BodyTalk, Tourani started practising on her family – and their health improved dramatically, she says. She has now been practising it for 15 years and teaching it for more than 10.

Tourani describes BodyTalk as a holistic therapy grounded in the belief that living organisms have the capability to heal themselves more effectively than technology can. "It combines elements of both Eastern and Western medicine to facilitate personal healing and growth," she says.

Some doctors, family physicians, and even surgeons, swear by a combined East/West approach. London-based cardiologist Dr Boon Lim says "modern – read 'Western' – medicine is good for preventing death, and traditional – often Eastern – practices are good for promoting wellness".

By taking a holistic approach rather than just tackling one specific issue, BodyTalk provides a "health care system that promotes emotional, physical and physiological well-being",



John Veltheim, the creator of the BodyTalk system, with a patient. Photo: Facebook

It combines elements of both Eastern and Western medicine to facilitate personal healing

ANGIE TOURANI, BODYTALK PRACTITIONER

Tourani says. The approach is based on a number of key beliefs – that the body can heal itself using what practitioners call "innate wisdom"; that stress affects overall health; and that the body communicates via energetic circuitry and stress can interrupt healthy communication. This does not sound too "woo-woo".

Tourani and I face one another through our respective screens – she in Hong Kong, me a long way away. Her voice is soft and melodic. She describes how she's going to "defrag me", like you would a congested computer; she tells me the layering up of stress has left me in a highly sensitised state, always in fight-or-flight mode.

And this is true: I catastrophise exhaustively. I have already completed a questionnaire, so Tourani knows the problem I hope to address: migraines.

On her instruction, I close my eyes. You do not need to believe in BodyTalk for it to work, Tourani has told me. However, keeping an open mind definitely helps.

"Think of your mind as a re-

ceiving station for information. If your mind is closed, resistant or highly doubtful, it will be less receptive to the energy of the session," she says.

Headaches are just one condition BodyTalk treats – along with allergies, intolerances, insomnia, anxiety and depression. I am encouraged that a previous client reports good results.

The BodyTalk System was developed in the 1990s by John Veltheim. From Australia, Veltheim ran a successful clinic in Brisbane for 15 years and was principal of the Brisbane College of Acupuncture and Natural Therapies for five years. He adopted the system to manage his own poor health.

If I had been in Tourani's clinic, lying on her massage table, she would be touching my arm as she conducts the session. But I am sitting at my desk on the other side of the world.

I ask Tourani how a remote session can possibly work. "To provide a simplified explanation, we could say that everything is energy. When you deconstruct anything physical, you end up with molecules, atoms, subatomic particles and ultimately, frequencies of energy," she says.

"Everything – every person – has a unique frequency, the same as every radio or television station," Tourani adds. "I can 'tune in' to your unique energy frequency, access the information necessary to conduct the session and facilitate healing."

I begin to feel incredibly relaxed – more relaxed than I have felt in weeks. So relaxed, in fact, that I *might* fall asleep.

My earlier stress dissipates during the session as Tourani asks the occasional question and I am forced to face the things I have been anxious about, and consider how my stress has manifested, why, and why I felt it so acutely.

I am struck with the thought that this alone makes BodyTalk important: it is rare that we take time out of our lives to objectively consider the stress affecting us, and recognise its effect on our physiological well-being.

According to WebMD, 75 to 90 per cent of all doctor's office visits are for stress-related ailments and

complaints. Stress plays a part in a host of problems – high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, skin conditions, asthma, arthritis, depression, anxiety and, yes, headaches.

BodyTalk, Tourani says, "enhances and strengthens the body's immune system by improving the communication pathways between the brain and the immune system".

I don't know about that. But I do know that stress compromises immunity enormously, and that this fact has been proven by science. A 2021 study conducted by doctors in Australia showed that stress can dramatically affect the way our immune system responds to pathogens and tumours, for example.

But how widely is BodyTalk actually recognised? The Federal Health Department upholds the BodyTalk System in Australia, and in France, BodyTalk has been officially recognised as a practice under "non-conventional health care activities".

There are 200 BodyTalk practitioners teaching the system in 50 countries. Tourani teaches in Hong Kong.

Everything – every person – has a unique frequency, the same as every radio or television station

ANGIE TOURANI

I would like to tell you that my migraines vanished. But they have not. Despite my open mind, I did not really expect them to: I've battled with them my entire life, I've seen countless neurologists, been prescribed all sorts of medications. How could a single 20-minute session change that?

But, I was migraine-free for a while after my session; I enjoyed a longer interval between attacks, my head felt clean – as if something had been unclogged. Defragmented, even. I felt calmer.

Perhaps that's BodyTalk's greatest value: it makes us sit up and pay attention to what's happening in our lives and how that could be undoing our well-being. It forces us to listen to our bodies. And that has to be a good thing.

How dancing can help women cope with menopause

As well as promoting a toned physique, it eases symptoms such as hot flushes and mood swings

Sasha Gonzales
life@scmp.com

Elizabeth Lai started Zumba classes about 15 years ago. She says the fast-paced Latin-inspired dance is just what she needs to feel strong, fit and energised, especially on long and stressful days. It's also partly thanks to Zumba that Lai's been able to get a handle on her postmenopausal symptoms.

"Zumba is easy to follow with just visual cues and you don't need dance experience," the 62-year-old Hongkonger says.

"I love the music and the fact that I always feel so amazing after a class. It's a vigorous workout and a great opportunity to de-stress and decompress."

"Dealing with menopause at this age can be a challenge, but I believe that my active and healthy lifestyle, which Zumba is a part of, has made symptoms like mood swings and hot flushes a little easier to deal with."

Dancing was recently discovered to be an excellent form of exercise for women transitioning through menopause. During "the change", which typically begins at 51, women tend to gain weight because of falling oestrogen levels and experience high cholesterol and other metabolic disturbances, which put them at a higher risk of cardiovascular disease.

They may also be less physically active, which might translate to a reduction in lean muscle mass and a drop in bone density, raising the likelihood of fractures and falls.

These changes often leave women in their 50s and 60s with a poorer self-image and lower self-esteem.

Physical activity can address most of these problems. A small study found that dancing in particular improved the cholesterol levels, fitness and body composition of postmenopausal women, and, in the process, their self-image and self-esteem.

In addition, a dancing regimen three times a week was said to improve balance, posture, gait and strength, all of which may contribute to greater independence and a better quality of life for postmenopausal women.

The study was published online this July in *Menopause*, the journal of The North American Menopause Society.

According to physiotherapist Gwyneth Hung from Matilda International Hospital, exercise is important for maintaining wellness at every stage of a woman's life, but especially during and after menopause.

"Exercise helps build and maintain muscle mass and bone density, ward off cardiovascular problems, maintain body weight and relieve some of the symptoms of menopause – for instance, it can improve a woman's mood and give mental clarity, reduce stress and help her sleep better," Hung says.

"Exercise can also target metabolic risks by increasing 'good' cholesterol while lowering 'bad' cholesterol and triglyceride levels."

She says dancing is an excel-

lent form of exercise, and not only because it's low-cost and fun.

As well as improving heart and lung function and boosting aerobic fitness, this workout increases muscular strength, endurance and motor fitness; strengthens muscles and bones; keeps weight in check; improves coordination, agility and flexibility; helps with balance and spatial awareness; and can assist with emotional well-being and enhance social skills.

In addition to aerobic exercise such as dancing, Hung also recommends strength, flexibility, balance and postural exercises for women aged 50 and up.

"With osteoporosis being a major concern for postmenopausal women, I must stress the importance of weight-bearing activity to strengthen your muscles and bones."

"If you already have osteoporosis, avoid high-impact activities like jumping and running and talk to your doctor before starting any exercise programme. If you're new to exercise, remember to start out slow."

How much exercise should you do if you're postmenopausal? Hung says that the National Osteoporosis Foundation in the US and the US Centres for Disease

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ELIZABETH LAI

Control and Prevention recommend strength-training exercises at least twice a week, and 2½ hours of moderate-intensity aerobic activity a week.

Hema Mirpuri has offered Zumba classes at her Hong Kong studio, The Yoga Room in Sheung Wan, since 2016. She's noticed that the class is especially popular with older students, including Lai, who takes classes there once or twice a week.

"Zumba incorporates different dance styles, like Salsa, Bhangra [Indian folk dance] and hip-hop, so it's fun to do, and most of the songs are repeated each week, giving everyone time to perfect their moves. The students tell me that it helps with their fitness, balance and coordination, plus, it's a chance for them to socialise and have a good time with friends."

In recent years, Lai has taken up yoga, Pilates, mixed-martial arts body combat cardio training, and high-intensity interval training. But she believes it's her whole lifestyle that's contributed to her looking and feeling her best as her body continues to change.

"Having a full, healthy and busy life helps so much. To me, this means doing a variety of physical activities, eating a balanced diet, maintaining my family and social connections, getting sufficient sleep every night, and going about my day with a sense of joy and purpose."



Elizabeth Lai in a Zumba class at The Yoga Room. Photo: K.Y. Cheng