

'I Tried an Abdominal Massage for My Pelvic Pain—Here's What Happened'

"For the most part it felt good..."

AS TOLD TO MELISSA FIORENZA FOR PREVENTION



This article was written by Melissa Fiorenza and provided by our partners at Prevention.

To help ease a painful medical condition, Sharlene Styles turned to an ancient remedy, and ended up with more health benefits than she expected.

I had been dealing with interstitial cystitis (IC), a chronic urinary issue that causes bladder and pelvic pain (and the need to *always* search for a bathroom), for more than 10 years when my research turned up Maya Abdominal Massage—a non-invasive external massage technique that manipulates the internal organs. Until that time, everything else I had tried was just a temporary fix. I was desperate to resolve the pain for good, and figured, why not try it out? So I made an appointment with a local energy healer trained in natural health practices.

Not knowing much about Maya Abdominal Massage, I arrived at her practice feeling a bit apprehensive, but also hopeful. The entire session lasted about an hour, and it was actually incredibly soothing. Between the soft music playing and the comforting room adorned with crystals, it didn't feel clinical at all

The healer started by explaining the foundations of the technique. I learned that the Maya, an indigenous people of Mexico and Central America, believe that a woman's uterus is the center of her being. In their culture, any time a woman experiences a traumatic situation, this type of massage is performed to ensure that the uterus is aligned. If it's ever misaligned, they believe, everything else in her life will be off balance.

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Next came the actual massage, which, I was happy to learn, didn't hurt at all. It's not very often that someone massages your abdomen, so there are certainly tender spots, but for the most part it felt good, just like a regular massage. But at this kind of appointment, I learned, it's about exploration, too—finding out where your organs are located so you can manipulate them. It's funny; we go through life without having a connection to our internal organs unless something goes wrong. But suddenly, I was able to actually feel my uterus, feel the intestines, and really get to know my body. The focus wasn't on my bladder specifically; it was about bringing blood flow to all of my internal organs and relieving congestion and stagnation. I learned how to perform the technique on myself so that I didn't need to make another appointment, and off I went with my homework.

Within a couple weeks of lying in my bed, oil on my abdomen, doing self-massage every two to three days, something crazy happened: It worked. My IC symptoms diminished, and then quickly disappeared. But soon after that, so did my nightly routine. What can I say? Life got busy and I was feeling good, until the symptoms crept back about a year later. That's when I went to another practitioner and got serious.

Like my first appointment, this session was calming and educational. I learned the same technique with a little variation, and went home with a mission to keep it up. I realized that one reason I dropped the routine so quickly before was because it felt a little labor-intensive. I didn't love the idea of getting oiled up right before bed, so I decided to do it in the shower each night for just a few minutes using soap instead of oil. That technique worked much better with my lifestyle, and sure enough, my IC symptoms eased up almost immediately. No longer was I always looking for a bathroom, or struggling with the pain. In fact, it didn't stop with just the IC.

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My PMS symptoms became nearly nonexistent and my cycle regulated. The self-nurturing routine also seemed to balance me out emotionally and gave me more energy throughout the day. I loved feeling so in tune with my body, and because my IC wasn't a constant source of stress, I felt more at ease with life in general. That's why I still keep up with it. Pain is always a good motivator, but even without pain, it really can do wonders for your mind and body.

Curious about how exactly Maya Abdominal Massage can ease IC and PMS symptoms? The uterus hangs inside the pelvis like a hammock, **explains Gabrielle Francis**, a naturopathic doctor and author of **The Rockstar Remedy**. It's extremely common for the uterus to be folded in half, which is known as "anteflexion" or "retroflexion" depending on the positioning, she says. "When it is folded forward it puts pressure on the bladder. When it's backwards it puts pressure on the colon. The misaligned uterus can cause pain, cramping, UTIs, bladder irritation, constipation, interstitial cystitis, and many other symptoms."

The massage, she says, returns the uterus and ovaries to the proper position. "This affects the function of all the organs in the region including the bladder, colon, and ovaries. The massage increases the circulation of blood and nutrients into the organs of the pelvis." It also allows the muscles in the region to relax and reduces cramping, a frequent symptom of PMS, she adds, and returns the pelvic organs to homeostasis, which in turn allows the hormones to go into balance as well.