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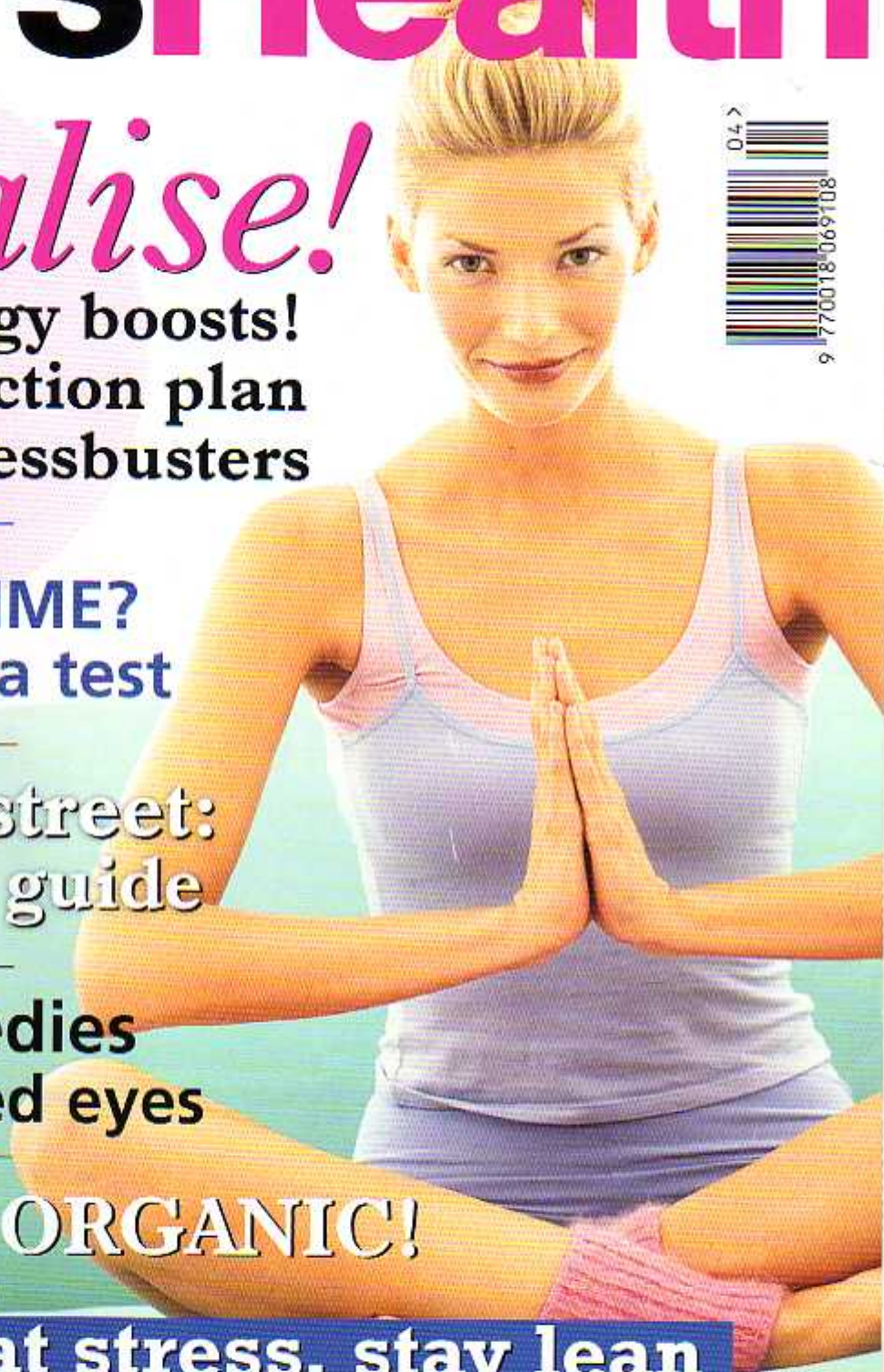
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The secrets of... spinal touch

This hands-on therapy can help a wide range of health problems, from back pain to insomnia. By Maria McCarthy

Although not widely known in the UK, spinal touch therapy is a gentle technique that can help a host of problems by manipulating the body to relax the muscles and improve posture. It was developed in the US around 90 years ago by John Hurley, a British engineer turned chiropractor. He devised a system of healing based on influences as diverse as engineering principles, chiropractic and Chinese medicine.

* How does it work?

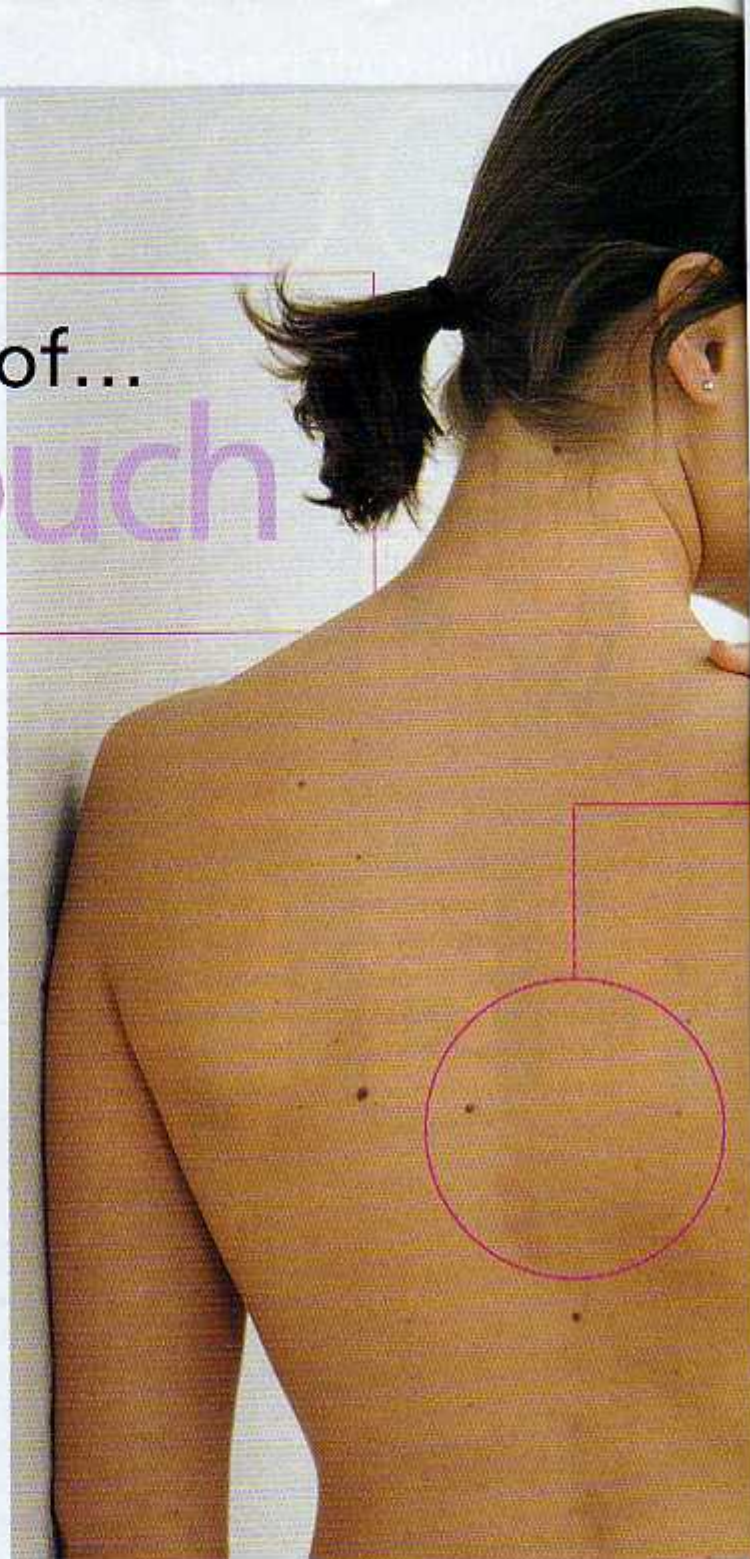
'Spinal touch is based on the principle that stress can be held in the muscle tissue,' says practitioner Sue Weller. 'This can be the result of whiplash injury, work-related stress or emotional tension. Over time, this can pull the vertebrae out of alignment, distorting the spine and affecting your centre of gravity, resulting in back and joint pain. It can also affect the central nervous system, which can lead to a host of symptoms, including digestive problems and menstrual and nervous disorders.'

* What does a session involve?

The therapist will take your medical history. You will then be asked to undress to your underwear, your posture will be assessed and the therapist will note any signs of misalignment, such as curvature of the spine or extra muscle bulk in certain areas of the back. They will then use a skin pencil to mark a point along the line where your bottom meets your thighs to indicate where the imbalance lies.

The treatment takes place with you lying on your front on a couch. 'The misalignment point, marked during the assessment, is pressed throughout the treatment, and you receive a gentle massage to relax the muscles around the spinal cord,' says Sue. This involves manipulating the muscles between the vertebrae, the shoulders and neck and, finally, the abdominal muscles. 'Unlike chiropractic, which requires firm manipulation, spinal touch is extremely gentle,' says Sue.

Afterwards you will be reassessed to measure how your posture has changed. 'The change varies a lot,' says Sue. 'But sometimes it



can be quite dramatic.' She suggests having six treatments initially, and then assessing the progress. 'Ideally, once realigned, people could have occasional treatments to prevent further problems.'

* What conditions can it help?

Sue has had success in treating people with symptoms ranging from joint pain and arthritis to fatigue. 'Because spinal touch helps people's bodies relax, it improves health as a whole,' she says. It can be used for many health problems, including gynaecological disorders, sports injuries, sciatica, and headaches. However, there is no scientific evidence of its benefits available yet.

* Who might benefit?

'Because spinal touch is such a gentle treatment, it is safe for absolutely anyone, including elderly people and children,' says



Spinal touch therapy involves gentle manipulation of the back muscles



'It keeps me healthy'



Julie Cartwright, 38, is a business woman.

'I was in a car crash and sustained whiplash and had pains in my neck and migraines. My doctors suggested I take steroids but I wanted a more natural approach. Then, a nurse suggested spinal touch therapy. I was cynical initially, but after a few sessions I was getting far fewer migraines, which I realised was as a result of the treatments.

'I've been seeing my practitioner, Gloria, for two years and only get a bad headache about once every couple of months. I see her once a fortnight and really enjoy the session. I see spinal touch really as a preventative measure, and an important part of keeping healthy.'

■ Gloria Ferriday, practitioner: 01543 274221.

Sue. It can also be adapted for pregnant women, even when they are in the very late stages of pregnancy.

* How to find a practitioner

There are approximately 150 spinal touch practitioners in the UK. To find one near you, or to find out about training to become a spinal touch therapist, contact The British and European Spinal Touch Association on 01785 616409, or the Association of Light Touch Therapists on 01424 430001.



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