

Ortho-Bionomy

OSTEOPATHIC PRINCIPLES STIMULATE SELF-HEALING

This gentle, noninvasive technique is based on the osteopathic philosophy and homeopathic principles of stimulating the body's own resources for self-healing. It may be used on its own or combined with massage therapy.

by Luann Overmyer

The term Ortho-Bionomy® was coined by its founder, British osteopath Arthur Lincoln Pauls, who described this philosophy as “the correct application of the natural laws of life.” According to Pauls, “[Ortho-Bionomy] is really about understanding your whole life cycle. Naturally, we focus on the structure because that is the literal skeleton upon which our life is built. When your structure works right, your circulation works better, you feel better, you think better.”

First and foremost, Ortho-Bionomy honors the body's inherent wisdom. The idea of a body's inherent wisdom is not a new concept; homeopathic physicians have studied and applied the Law of Similars for more than 200 years. Dorland's Medical Dictionary defines this law as the homeopathic principle which states “that a substance which in large doses will produce symptoms of a specific disease will, in extremely small doses, cure it.” In other words, the smallest dose of a substance incites the body to respond to the disease.

During the rise of the industrial age, A.T. Still, the founder of osteopathy, based his teachings on

the concept that the body was a perfect machine designed by God, and by coming to understand the natural workings of this divine design, disease could be mastered. Only that which can be cured from within can be cured from without, he believed. The same osteopathic philosophy and homeopathic principles of stimulating the body's own resources for self-healing are the foundation of Ortho-Bionomy.

During his osteopathic training, Pauls was introduced to a paper entitled “Spontaneous Release by Positioning,” by physician Lawrence Jones. Jones found if he placed a person in a position that exaggerated an osteopathic lesion for 15 to 20 minutes, the body would spontaneously self-correct and realign itself without force or rough manipulation. Pauls recognized the original concepts of osteopathy and the principles of self-correction within Jones' work and began to experiment for ways to shorten the release time.

Almost by accident, Pauls discovered by using subtle movements and adding slight compression toward the joint, spontaneous release could occur in 10 to 30 seconds. His research led to techniques



that were teachable and repeatable, the foundation of Ortho-Bionomy training.

Proprioception's reflex action

The key to Ortho-Bionomy's results is in the reflex action of proprioception. Movement and compression activate the proprioceptors surrounding a joint. These proprioceptive nerves signal the central nervous system of the relative shortened and stretched muscle fibers around this positioned joint. The reflexive signal stimulates the stretch receptors in the muscles surrounding the joint, so the fibers can reset to normal resting length, resulting in the release of tension and holding—and often the release of pain. By rebalancing the tone around the joint, multiple areas can be addressed with one technique.

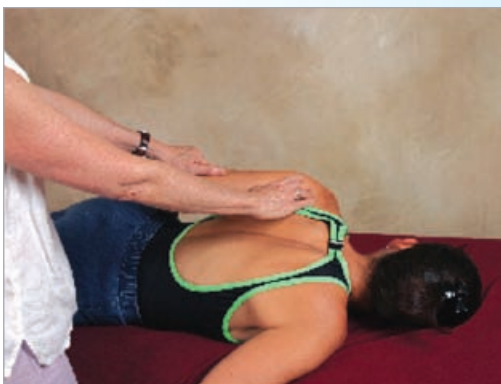
For example, the positioning for a posterior rotated ilium often releases sciatic pain. Sometimes long-standing patterns of holding and dysfunction are released in one session as the proprioception recalibrates to the increased range of motion and the ease of more functional movement takes precedence.

By using the nerves to relay the position of the joint, the muscles are reflexively released from chronic holding patterns and pain signals are interrupted. This is such a different concept to those who have been trained to knead the tension out. For some it may require a bit of rethinking to grasp that they could actually achieve more by doing less.

Ortho-Bionomy is definitely about thinking outside of the box. It is almost 180 degrees from what is ordinarily taught. Instead of moving through resistance, resistance is respected. Instead of deep thumb pressure or overworking the wrist and hands, which can eventually cause strain or injury to the therapist, a slow, easy positioning technique allows for a more embodied relaxation in the client and therapist. In Ortho-Bionomy, the positioning cues the client to release. The practitioner is freed from doing, freed from needing to fix and free to be with the client

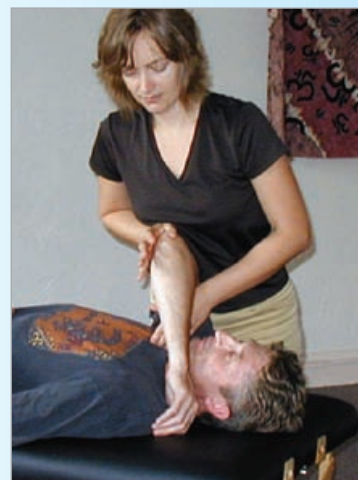


Using specific points and positioning, Ortho-Bionomy releases tension patterns within the muscles in seconds. Light compression from the bottom of the scapula releases tension above the spine of the scapula and can help with insomnia.



Movements and positioning stimulate self-correcting reflexes and are comfortable for the client. This is a key Ortho-Bionomy position for relieving pain in the shoulder, arm and hand, and is one of the releases for carpal tunnel syndrome.

Instructor Miranda Monkhorst demonstrates an Ortho-Bionomy shoulder release technique.



Instructor Miranda Monkhorst demonstrates an Ortho-Bionomy clavicle release technique.



to recognize and reaffirm the client's own inherent ability to find comfort.

"Ortho-Bionomy provides information about how we, as a being, exist in the physical and energetic world," says Ortho-Bionomy practitioner Stephanie Smart of Indianapolis, Indiana. "This information is then integrated into the nervous system—and as a result, a person can have greater awareness of how their body moves, an increased awareness of what is comfortable to them both physically and energetically, a greater sense of how to find positions of comfort in their own body and an increased sense of physical empowerment due to the fact that the client is very active in any changes that occur as a result of an Ortho-Bionomy session."

The client's perspective

For clients in pain, the gentle contact, the focus on comfort, the ease of positioning and the relaxed presence of the therapist offer an opportunity to explore the possibilities of relief within a safe and therapeutic process. Recognition of comfort within the body replaces attention to pain.

Re-education toward ease is naturally and effortlessly incorporated with isometric techniques and awareness-

based postural exercises the client can practice at home. These self-care techniques remind and empower the client of the body's natural ability to return to balance and well-being.

Massage clients with occasional knots and tension patterns appreciate the quick, effective releases of Ortho-Bionomy, which allow the therapist to focus less on problems and more on relaxation massage.

"Ortho-Bionomy is a great modality, very helpful for pre- or post-surgery, because it is so gentle," says Ortho-Bionomy practitioner Shamaï Buckel of Santa Rosa, California. "It's great for neck, back and hip pain, very effective for joint pain and helps to increase range of motion."

Ortho-Bionomy practitioner Corilee Sanders of Corvallis, Oregon, uses the technique in conjunction with both reiki and massage therapy.

"Because the practitioner is not forcing, pushing or hurrying the recipient, and because the work is done in a respectful, 'conversation[al]' style, rather than one in which a practitioner does something 'to' the recipient, the changes that occur are longer lasting and less traumatic or difficult for the body to integrate," she says.

THE ORTHO-BIONOMY TECHNIQUE IN ACTION

The applications of Ortho-Bionomy can seem profound in their results. Let us look at the shoulder, for example:

1. A tender point is identified at the coracoid process. The arm is gently moved into the correlating comfortable position of release, usually curving or caving around the tender point.

Light compression is applied from the elbow back toward the shoulder joint. This gentle positioning with compression is held from 10 to 30 seconds, and then the arm is slowly lowered back to the table and the tender point is rechecked for tenderness. Generally the pain is reduced or gone, and tension and tightness around the point have also diminished.

2. Facilitating a release for all the muscles surrounding the shoulder joint may require more than one positioning. There are actually eight specific Ortho-Bionomy reflex points and positions to release a shoul-

der, and each corresponding position helps release the various muscle groups surrounding the joint.

In severe cases of frozen shoulder, it is particularly important to respect any resistance to movement in the joint and approximate the positioning within the comfort zone of the client.

3. All releases depend on fine-tuning the position by moving in accord with the path of least resistance and moving out of the positioning slowly and gently.

Often in the case of a frozen shoulder, isometric techniques are used to override the fear of pain from movement by cueing the muscles to attempt movement, while the comfortable positioning is maintained.

These isometric or isotonic exercises might be added to the client's home-care program, along with some posture exercises, if suggesting home care is within the scope of the therapist's practice.

—Luann Overmyer



For those who can't tolerate deep work, Ortho-Bionomy is ideal as a preparation technique. For example, in working with painful scar tissue, subtle techniques release tension and pain, so the massage therapist can then apply cross-fiber friction to an area that is no longer sensitive. This work addresses such conditions as sciatica, low-back pain, whiplash, fibromyalgia, carpal tunnel syndrome, scoliosis and plantar fasciitis.

Training in the technique

The benefits of including Ortho-Bionomy in the practice of massage are obvious from the first class. Seasoned practitioners recognize immediately the benefits of including Ortho-Bionomy in their practices. Massage therapists who practice deep-tissue and sports massage are always amazed to find how little effort is needed on their part to facilitate a painless release of the psoas muscle or the fifth lumbar. The suboccipital area that usually requires sustained pressure is easily released with one simple extension positioning of the neck.

For some students, just one class is all that's needed to begin to incorporate positional release techniques and the concepts of "away from pain and toward ease of movement" with their clients. For others, the journey into Ortho-Bionomy is just beginning. With each course, from Exploration of Movement Patterns to Posture and Post-techniques to Isometrics and Isotonics, the student gains greater understanding of the structural alignment principles in which the work is based.

Exploration of Movement Patterns helps the practitioner assess movement, identify patterns and address the chain of causation for a complaint. The Posture and Post-techniques class presents techniques for working with scoliosis, postural patterns and gait, teaching clients how to gain an embodied sense of themselves for greater functionality and comfort. The Isometrics and Isotonics class helps the client re-educate extinguished reflexes and re-establish appropriate tone.

An advanced course teaches techniques that often work more quickly, and the student learns to listen more deeply into the tissue for subtle patterns of preference and movement. Additional courses demonstrate ways of working with the energetic interrelationship of the physical and

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emotional aspects of the client's patterning.

In every Ortho-Bionomy course, the philosophy and principles of right alignment and self-corrective capacity of the individual are foundational.

All of these courses and more are included in the 500-hour Practitioner Training Program sponsored by the Society of Ortho-Bionomy International and taught by registered instructors. After just one class, students report impressive results, as they incorporate the concepts and techniques into their practices. Through continued classes, sessions received, feedback and

tutorials from instructors, students advance and fine-tune their work. Thousands of bodyworkers have taken classes and incorporated the concepts and principles into their work.

Instructors and practitioners can be found throughout the world and are listed on the Society of Ortho-Bionomy International's Web site, www.ortho-bionomy.org.

A recognizable therapy

More than 150 practitioners of Ortho-Bionomy practice this work as their sole modality. Others integrate the principles with other methods, thus creating their own individual style of bodywork. When the principles are used, whether as a solo therapy or in concert with others, the essence of Ortho-Bionomy is always recognizable.

"Ortho-Bionomy provides an easy way to uncover and discover oneself without having to re-enact the old stories on one's path to whole healing," says Ortho-Bionomy practitioner Kim Lincoln of Olympia, Washington. "It's truly a beautiful system of introducing people to the freeing feeling of spaciousness, affecting both body and consciousness."

Luann Overmyer is a registered practitioner and instructor of Ortho-Bionomy. She teaches throughout the U.S. and Australia, trains practitioners and instructors and is writing a book on self-care.

Tracy Gilliam, Miranda Monkbhorst, Marla Moore, Kalpesh Patel and Brenda Sistrom contributed to this article.