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WORDS: Chris Ritchie

BEHIND THE SCIENCE... WITH A SACRAL MASSAGE THERAPIST

CHRIS RITCHIE FINDS OUT ABOUT AN INCREASINGLY POPULAR TREATMENT WHICH AIMS TO IMPROVE FERTILITY THROUGH THERAPEUTIC MANIPULATION OF THE ABDOMEN...

We spend so much of our lives squashed up, be that sitting at work, slouched in front of the TV, in our cars, on public transport... all the while putting tremendous pressure on our abdomens. There is a mass of recent research that suggests all the time we spend sitting is bad for us, putting undue strain on our backs and our muscle fibres. According to some, this could even reduce our life expectancy.

Fertility can be profoundly affected by this squashing and compressing of the abdomen, but in the absence of being able to spend all day lying down, there are a few things women can do to look after their abdomens and ensure they are working to their optimum levels. One of those is abdominal sacral massage, which is increasingly being seen as a means to help and improve one's fertility.

Nicky Lambert is a therapist at Simply Healing near Horsham. For the uninitiated, she explains what this massage is all about. "The purpose of the abdominal sacral massage is to bring the organs within the abdominal area back into alignment. It is a gentle, surprisingly soothing massage which helps to release any pressure, strengthening the surrounding

muscles and ligaments, allowing for blood circulation to improve, nerve endings to be stimulated and lymph flow to improve to a point where the body can function to its optimum level."

The massage itself is carried out in three parts. First is the fertility massage. "After locating the uterus, different massage and stretching movements are carried out around the abdomen and centred on the belly button," Nicky says. "There is also a rocking movement which can help to release long-held negative emotional baggage. The massage gets deeper as it progresses. The purpose of this part of the massage is to increase the blood flow to the right areas to nourish them, help them to get back on track and keep them healthy."

"The fertility part of the massage ends with a uterine 'lift'," Nicky continues. "It is slightly weird but at the same time reassuring to know that your uterus is there and moving like it should be."

The second part of the massage is centred on the digestive tract, starting with the ileo-caecal valve and moving in increments around the colon, which aims to increase circulation, remove blockages, loosen debris and help

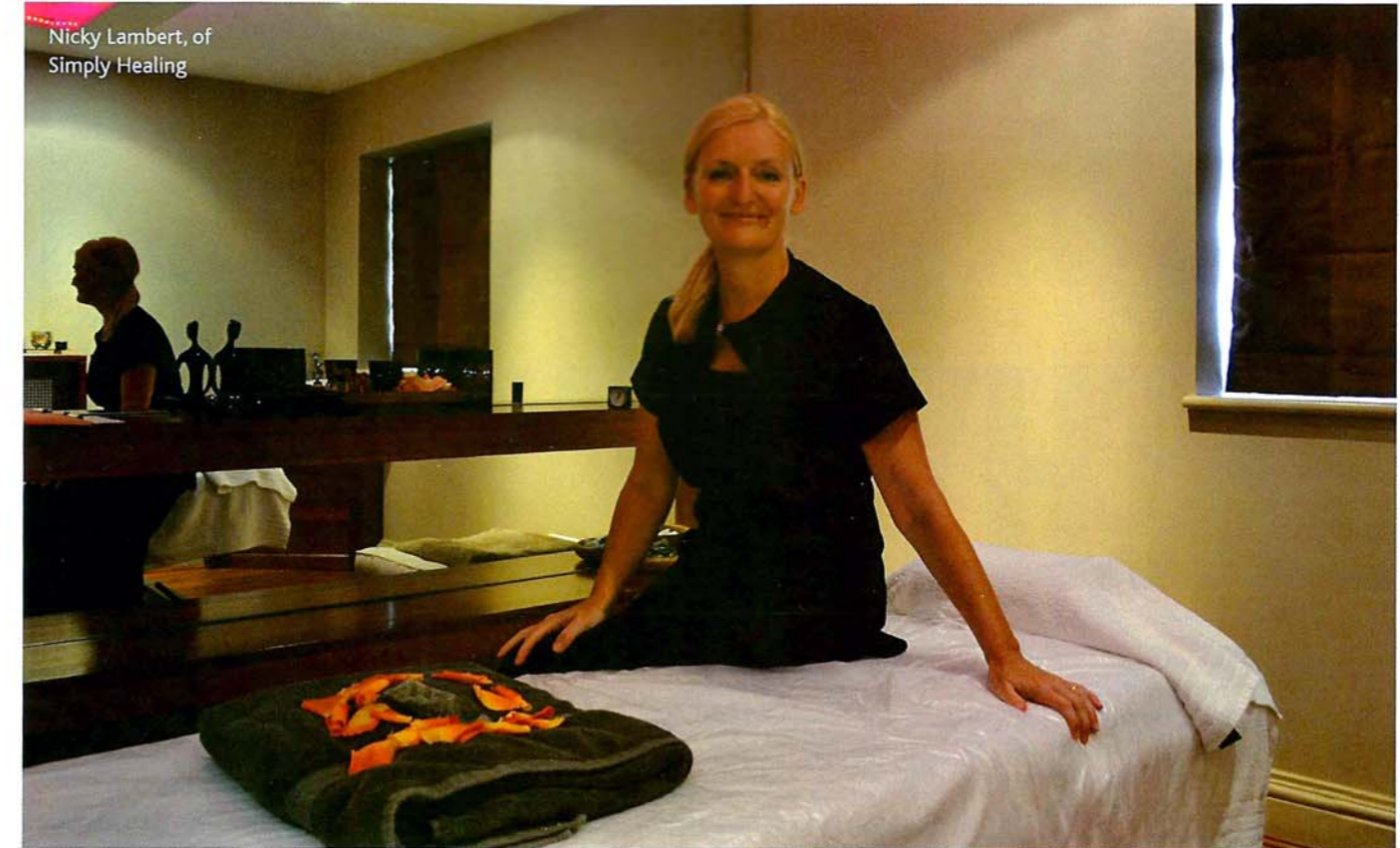
to promote natural movement, allowing the abdomen to feel lighter and freer.

For the final part, the client lies on her front so the therapist has access to the lower back.

"The focus here is on the lower erector spinae and QL muscles – the lumbar region either side of the spine," explains Nicky. "This involves massaging and encouraging good circulation to these areas before moving onto the coccyx. This part of the massage consists of deep stretching moves before stretching and shaking the glutes – not at all unpleasant but if you haven't been informed about it, it may be a bit of a surprise! The massage continues with a hip lift and shakes either side, and concludes with hands-on and deep breaths."

Simply Healing introduced the abdominal sacral massage into its Fertility Detox around a year ago. And, although it's a specialised massage to carry out, Nicky and her colleagues quickly got to grips with the technique. "It was three days of intensive training within a very small group," she says.

"Everyone on the training course had to practise and be practised on – it was very important to get to know and understand this 'new' and unusual massage, and experience



it first-hand for ourselves. That means we can empathise with our clients. It really helps knowing the usefulness of the treatment – the fact that it is so soothing, relaxing and just a little bit funny is an added bonus. I haven't come across anyone yet who hasn't enjoyed this treatment."

It's a treatment that Nicky finds particularly satisfying. "Being late into motherhood myself, and having faced various difficulties along the way, I can really appreciate the anxiety and turmoil that some people have to go through in order to achieve their dream of becoming a parent. The whole thing can be stressful, impersonal and an emotional rollercoaster. However, had I not experienced those difficulties myself, I would have never ended up in this line of work."

Is the personal nature of this massage, then, something that adds to its appeal? "It is a very personal massage on both a physical and emotional level," Nicky smiles. "I think it is really important to explain to the client exactly what to expect prior to treating them and to also assess progress throughout the treatment."

"I try to reassure my clients by letting them know I'm on their side and that I know where

"It is so soothing, relaxing and just a little bit funny. I haven't come across anyone yet who hasn't enjoyed this treatment!"

they're coming from. I do get people opening up to me about all sorts of things. Whatever anyone tells me is confidential, but inside the room I try to help them to put things into perspective. It's not about judging and we never would; it's about healing and helping people to get what they deserve.

"Everyone I treat is unique and I have to work on experience, instinct and observation in order to set the right tone for them as an individual."

Although the treatment is built into the general Fertility Detox package, it is also available to non-residents. Nicky explains the patient journey: "For residents on the Fertility Detox, they have a schedule of treatments so they know exactly what treatments they are having and when they are having them. On arrival here, once the clients have settled in they go through a thorough consultation so everyone here who needs to know knows what we are

dealing with and the desired outcome. We all then pull together to try to make that happen.

"For the non-resident clients, they still require a thorough consultation and discuss their needs and what they hope to achieve. Prior to the treatment, the clients wait in a comfortable area and after reading through their notes I go and introduce myself to them and lead them to one of our lovely treatment rooms."

"Once inside, I explain what will happen during the massage. It is important to be professional, respectful and reassuring before, during and after any treatment you give."

Nicky is evidently proud of her position and ability to make a difference for her patients. "The change we see in people from when they arrive to when they leave can be remarkable," she enthuses. "It's a real pleasure and a privilege to be part of the team, and when we get the results, that makes it all the more worthwhile!"