

## A Time-Honored Alternative Mayan Abdominal Massage

by Jill DeDominicis

Spring offers us the perfect natural metaphor for birth and renewal. As flowers, insects and animals around us begin to bloom and show vibrant signs of life after the dormancy of winter, it can be an inspiring time in which to lay new plans, discover a new appreciation and respect for our bodies, and look forward to new beginnings and promises. But for the woman or couple struggling with infertility, spring can be a painful reminder of the sometimes harsh realities of life—that things do not always unfold as nature intended.

Typically women and men who struggled with issues of infertility and impotency were given few alternatives—mostly invasive and expensive solutions such as hormone injections, prescription drugs, in vitro fertilization or other surgeries. But, from the remote little village of San Antonio, located not far from the Guatemalan border in Western Belize, comes a more natural alternative—Mayan Abdominal Massage (MAM).

An ancient modality practiced by bush doctor and shaman Don Elijio Panti, Mayan Abdominal Massage—or simply called la sobada (literally “the massage”) by the natives—was administered to numerous women for relief not only from infertility, but also to address painful menstrual periods, tired legs and varicose veins, headaches and digestive ailments. In the '80s, a Chicago doctor named Rosita Arvigo traveled to Central America to learn this almost lost art of abdominal massage from Panti. Although he was already 90 years old at the time, Panti's healing touch was still being sought by many of the village's women.

The technique is based around the notion that the uterus is the spiritual center of a woman's body—if it is out of balance, the entire body will also be so. Yet, having a misplaced or tipped uterus is not an uncommon occurrence in women, a condition which Western medicine often leaves largely unaddressed. The uterus can fall out of place from ordinary factors such as falls to the sacrum, aerobics or high impact dancing and sports, wearing high-heeled shoes or working on cement surfaces with poor foot support, to more intense events like difficult labor, rape and sexual abuse, or surgeries that damage uterine ligaments. In recognition of this common, yet sometimes debilitating disorder, Arvigo has imparted knowledge gained through a decade spent researching the ancient system to some 200 practitioners in the U.S. and other countries. Malinda Gibbons, a San Diego practitioner and acupuncturist, has found that the method offers a perfect balance to the women's health modalities she already employed. “I was already doing acupuncture and herbs and stretching for women, and what I really liked about [MAM] was that it included the structural aspect of a treatment,” Gibbons says. “It completes the circle of what I'm doing and I'm really enjoying that.”

For the last eight or so months, Gibbons has been treating fertility patients and women struggling with uncomfortable or unregulated periods to much success. “I've also treated some women who are post partum and it really helps them with their healing process after giving birth. Patients have told me they feel they've gotten back in touch with that part of their body following childbirth, and it also can help heal trauma from Cesarean sections.” The slow and penetrating manner of Mayan Abdominal Massage releases deep tissue spasms and helps the uterus reposition itself, facilitating better blood and lymph flow to the area, thereby speeding up the healing process after birth.



Rosita Arvigo and Don Elijio Panti.

A tilted or misplaced uterus can put undue pressure on surrounding organs, arteries, nerves and lymph vessels, causing other health complications. For example, a retro (backward leaning) uterus can press against the colon; an antero (forward leaning) uterus may lean on top of the bladder. Gibbons explains that, like acupuncture, MAM helps infertility and other issues by addressing and removing blockages in the abdominal area for better chi flow throughout the body. “It does reposition the uterus and therefore there's more blood flow the area, but it also opens up circulation to other parts of the pelvis—the ovaries, the fallopian tubes. If there's any blockage there, it can be hard to clear and sometimes the uterus will lean on the bladder and colon, [disrupting] what these organs need to do to help the body detox.”

It is not a technique provided solely for women; many men can benefit from the treatment as well, as it addresses larger issues such as a swollen or congested prostate, impotence, back aches, or digestive and elimination upsets that are typically treated by drugs, surgeries, or sometimes not addressed at all. Once balance is restored in the abdomen, toxins are flushed, hormones return to normal order, and nutrients can better flow to their necessary destinations.

There are little to no side effects, save some potential tenderness of the area following the treatment, which only means the amount of pressure should be lightened a bit. Once the proper amount of pressure is found for each individual, Gibbons can go to work, and she also instructs patients on how to self-administer the technique to maintain the benefits. She does point out that it is not recommended for women during menstruation or for those who have an IUD. As with most natural healing modalities, Mayan Abdominal massage can reach beyond just the physical. The touch and attention can lead to emotional release for deep-seated anxiety, fear, guilt and other harmful emotions that are often tucked away and stored deep within the gut. Mayan Abdominal Massage is a beautiful and natural system that allows us yet another alternative to drugs and other invasive attempts to cure our discomforts. It can change the lives of men and women on a physical and spiritual level, bringing better health for a lifetime, and we have the magic hands of Don Elijio Panti and the determination of Rosita Arvigo to thank for bringing it to our world.

To learn more about Mayan Abdominal Massage, check Dr. Rosita Arvigo's Web site [www.arvigomassage.com](http://www.arvigomassage.com). Malinda Gibbons practices MAM and other healing techniques at the AcuSport Health Center in San Diego, [www.acusporthealth.com](http://www.acusporthealth.com), and can be reached at 619/243-5109.