

# Fit for School with Samurai Shiatsu!

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Editor's Note - Fit for School with Samurai Shiatsu is a program well established in Germany, Switzerland and Austria. It is designed to increase fitness and decrease stress in school age children and elderly adults.

## It's time to act

At article entitled "Samurai-Massage: Shiatsu goes into schools" first publicized the project by the *Federal Working Party for Baby and Children Shiatsu* (*Bundesarbeitsgemeinschaft Babyund Kinder Shiatsu e.V. - baks e.V.*) to bring Shiatsu into schools and subsequently into family

homes. The aim is "to snowball" this initiative to establish Shiatsu in as many schools and other children's services as possible.

The initial impetus for the project arose from the reality that many children nowadays have a schedule which equals that of an adult business manager. Children also face performance pressures at school. When those pressures are combined with postural problems and concentration difficulties, some children display stress type symptoms that are known by many adults as well.

Children complain about stomach pains or headaches and are confronted with sleeping problems. In school they come to the attention of professionals because of their difficulties with learning; postural problems make it difficult to sit still on a chair all day and to concentrate for long hours. To alleviate their lack of sensory input, they either have to wriggle or "switch off", so no longer engaging with teaching, missing out on vital learning.

These findings are backed up by empirical data. The Robert Koch-Institute (Berlin, Germany) carried out a national, representative children and youth health survey between 2003 and 2006 ([www.kiggs.de](http://www.kiggs.de)). Around 18,000 children and young people took part in the survey. The data which follows relates to the motor skills module of the children and youth health survey which was carried out by Prof. Klaus Boes at the Institute for Sport and Sport Sciences at Karlsruhe University between 2002 and 2008. The children tested were between 4 and 17 years old.

These are some of the results:

- 35% of children and young people were unable to balance for two or more steps on a 3 cm wide beam on the floor going backwards
- 86% of children could not stand on one leg for one minute
- 43% were unable to touch their toes when carrying out a forward bend (this applied to 53% of boys and 33% of girls)

Another survey compiled by German health insurances (Krankenkassen-the National Health Service equivalent) also showed clearly the urgent need for action with regards to children and young people.

The data states that:

- 71% of all children complain regularly of stomach pains and headaches
- 50% of all children have concentration difficulties
- up to 65% of all children display postural damages
- 40% of all children complain about back aches

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How social status and migration background (especially with regards to girls) impacted on motor ability was damning. Results showed children and young people with a high social status had greater motor ability than those with a lower socioeconomic status. These findings were congruent with observations we ourselves made as part of a movement/obstacle course presented to children in Year 5 in a German comprehensive school.

- out of 181 tested pupils (10 and 11 years old) 134 were unable to stand on one leg for one minute
- 131 pupils were unable to reach the floor with their fingertips and extended legs
- walking backwards for 3 meters presented a great challenge for pupils – 109 pupils were unable to do so, 31 could walk 2 to 3 steps backwards on the 3 cm wide beam and 41 managed to walk just half the distance.

The movement/obstacle course used in the above survey showed that motor, co-ordination and balance skills were insufficiently developed in most pupils. Observations also showed that daily school life presented a huge challenge for many pupils – be it due to negative classroom atmosphere or heightened performance pressures and anxiety.

## ***Samurai Shiatsu!***

Something needed to be done to address these findings. Knowing Shiatsu could help, we developed the ***Samurai Shiatsu Program*** which is firmly rooted in Shiatsu. Children are fully clothed and learn to carry out a sequence of Shiatsu 'moves' on themselves and others. ***Samurai Shiatsu*** is designed so that through different qualities of touch various sensory perceptions are encouraged and activated. The word *Samurai* means "servant, companion, guardian" – and as the name for the program it aims to convey how children can nurture others as well as themselves. Showing respect and becoming aware of one's own and other people's boundaries are important principles of Shiatsu and the program actively works to develop this awareness.

As ***Samurai Shiatsu*** encourages the development of body awareness and taking the load off a strained back, the head is freed up so pupils are able to concentrate with greater ease on their learning. Another aim of the program is to nurture class cohesion and create greater health awareness for both teachers and pupils which in turn will have a positive effect on classroom atmosphere.

## **Practicalities!**

The various Shiatsu techniques and sequences are taught in a playful way as part of a story about two Japanese children, a boy called Kooko and a girl called Hanako. Japanese customs are also part of the session, for example to greet each other with 'Konichi wa' (Hello) or to ask 'O genki desu ka? (How are you, or more precisely, How is your Ki?).

Exercises are called "Samurai warms up in the sun", "Samurai pricks up the ears", "Samurai holds the head high", and "Samurai, Bear and Tiger meet". They are visually supported by beautifully drawn picture cards which serve as a memory aid and motivational tool. Children are taught to use 'strong, firm bear paw touch' as well as 'gentle, light tiger paws' to go up and down the spine.

There are also Do-In games and other body awareness exercises to start and finish a session or for when concentration flags in the classroom. 'How am I feeling' cards encourage children to be in touch with how they are and to show others – as a sign for 'I need space, thank you' or 'I'm great, let's get going.'

As with Shiatsu, an important aspect is to respect where each individual is 'at' and not to super-impose exercises and touch where it is not wanted or when the person is not ready for it yet. At the start of each session, children ask each other's permission before engaging in physical touch. Gentle, respectful touch is fostered and children are given the chance to give and receive positive touch regularly.

Practitioners who have trained as Samurai Shiatsu trainers go into schools and teach children and teachers the program. Instruction is divided into three sessions which last for up to 45 minutes each. The 'moves' are easy to

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learn and are quickly taken on board by children who then carry on with their practice: with their peers in class and at playtime, their parents, siblings, grandparents and friends at home. In this way, touch is carried into the community. The program is further supported with a book which includes the story and set of picture cards as well as website resources (see below). Ideally, schools should buy the book for each child who is participating in the program, however, this doesn't always happen in reality. Some schools were successful to get sponsorship for class sets of books; otherwise one copy and the set of cards have to be shared in class.

After 3 and then 6 months the trained practitioner returns to school for another session to observe how children and teachers get on and to make suggestions for further development where needed. Evaluation forms that document children's and teachers' thoughts and feelings before, during and after the program can be included should schools want to take part in such a survey. There are now many schools in Germany, Switzerland and Austria which practice Samurai Shiatsu regularly – all taught by qualified practitioners. Practitioners have found it invaluable to introduce Shiatsu touch to children and to 'spread the word about Shiatsu' into the wider world. For many, it has meant an expansion of their private practice.

Another exciting development has been the adaptation of the Samurai program for older adults. It has been carried out in various elder care centers and was received with great enthusiasm. As a result, one of the biggest German Social Care Charities (Arbeiterwohlfahrt e.v.) is now introducing ***Samurai Shiatsu for Older Adults*** in their care homes, specifically to support people living with Dementia and the onset of Alzheimer.

We think it is an exciting opportunity to establish ***Samurai Shiatsu*** in the United States, starting with workshops to train interested persons as ***Samurai Shiatsu Trainers***. Workshops will be run by Karin Kalbantner-Wernicke and Thomas Wernicke, (the founder members of this program) and supported by Julie Kaplan.

There will be a 3 day workshop and participants can come to one, two or all three days:

- Day 1-Presentation and application of the Samurai in schools program
- Day 2-classroom games, running teacher and parent workshops about Samurai Shiatsu
- Day 3-Samurai Shiatsu for Older Adults

Workshops will run May 8, 9 and 10 2015 in St. Petersburg, Florida!

If you would like more information see the Samurai project website at <http://www.kookoandfriends.co.uk>

For additional Membership Review information and to reserve a place in the upcoming workshops please contact Julie Kaplan, L.Ac. - [jmk33@mac.com](mailto:jmk33@mac.com)

## *Save The Date*

**ACUPUNCTURE EDUCATION DAY IN TALLAHASSEE**  
**March 10th, 2015**

**go to <http://fsoma.com/AcuEd-Day2015.html>  
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