

Zero Balancing (ZB) was developed in the early 1970s by osteopathic physician and medical doctor, Fritz Frederick Smith. Dr. Smith had a standard osteopathic practice in rural California to which he added studies in acupuncture. He experienced remarkable results with his patients by integrating principles from osteopathy, involving manipulation of bony structures, and acupuncture, involving balancing body energy. Not only did his patients find relief from many of their physical complaints, but they also commented consistently that their experiences transcended the physical. His patients expressed feeling happier, calmer, and more grounded and centered. As one of Dr. Smith's early patients said, "I feel balanced ... back to Zero... sort of Zero Balanced." The name resonated with Dr. Smith and stuck.

"ZB does a whole range of things," commented Michael Oruch, a certified Zero Balancer from New York who teaches ZB in Chicago and throughout the U.S. "It helps with stress, headache, back pain ...but more importantly, it helps people become more of who they are. The ancient Chinese belief is that our ancestral chi [energy] is in our bones, and ZB teaches you how to work with that. It teaches you to work with who and what people are at the core, with what we're made of. In the ZB vocabulary of touch are things that anyone in the healing professions ought to know; these are life skills."

What Does a ZB Session Look Like?

The Zero Balancer follows an elegant protocol that belies its profound effects. The basic protocol varies only slightly from patient to patient, though the timing and pacing can vary greatly depending on the setting, frame and predetermined time limits. A session usually lasts between 15 and 45 minutes.

The Zero Balancer will ask what is happening in the client's life; physical, emotional and/or spiritual influences are all welcome information. It is up to the client to decide what is important to share. Based on that information, the Zero Balancer and the client will decide together the goals and "frame" for the session. The job of the practitioner is to weave that chosen frame into the session. So if the client has determined, for example, that he or she wants the framework of the session to feel more balanced, clearer, more integrated, or "to release baggage" (whether physical or otherwise), part of the Zero Balancer's job is to find a way for the body to become a vehicle for accomplishing that goal metaphorically, while simultaneously keeping in mind the aches, pains or other

physical concerns the client has asked to have addressed.

After a brief assessment, the practitioner will ask the client to lie on his or her back, fully clothed, on the massage table. With a series of traction movements and the application of pressure from fingertips called “fulcrums” (applied mostly to the underside of the client’s body), the practitioner will follow a set protocol of treating the entire body, from the toes to top of the head.

John Hamwee, a Zero Balancer and author of the book, *Zero Balancing*, defines fulcrums as “still points on which the body can balance.” Where energy may be disorganized from trauma, stress or repetitive strain, possibly to the point of causing physical and structural pain and dysfunction, a fulcrum imposes a stronger, clearer field of energy. This provides the body the opportunity to reorganize. The rule of thumb is that the pressure of a fulcrum should either “feel good or hurt good,” and this is essential to an effective treatment. Both giver and receiver need to feel comfortable as an essential aspect of ZB touch.

The story goes that donkeys carrying loads up steep hills lean against one another – the donkey on the outside of the path leans inward, the donkey on the inside of the path leans out – forming a supportive relationship between them as they carry their loads. This “donkey-donkey” connection is what the Zero Balancer works toward with the client, one in which both giver and receiver feel strongly supported and at ease, with no undue effort. As a result of this donkey-donkey connection, an alchemical and therapeutic relationship evolves. A type of “dance” results, as the practitioner focuses his attention – and intention – on following the client’s involuntary and often wordless responses to the work. In this relationship, the pacing and depth of pressure evolve organically and meditatively from the relationship between the two people.

The meditative quality of ZB also differentiates it from traditional massage. The Zero Balancer brings a high level of focus to the session by listening to the client’s body with his or her hands, eyes and ears. This high level of attention – combined with the predetermined “frame” – makes the treatment a meditative experience for both people involved. Additionally, the deep level of the touch contacts one’s being at levels of both energy and structure, and this combination powerfully touches a person in the place where the body/mind resides.

Another essential aspect of ZB touch is the principle of working at “interface” with the client. The Zero Balancer consciously works to maintain the integrity of the client’s energy field, neither adding nor taking energy from the client, but rather facilitating a balancing effect of the patient’s own energy. This is a crucial skill for bodyworkers and massage therapists who often find their own energy drained by energetically depleted clients – or find themselves struggling with other boundary issues with clients.

Massage therapists, physical therapists, occupational therapists and other healing professionals will find ZB to be an excellent addition to their treatment “toolbox.”

According to Mary Murphy, a certified massage therapist and certified Zero Balancer who works at Lutheran General Hospital in Park Ridge, Ill., “ZB is a grounding and integrating tool par excellence. It is remarkably efficient at clearing even deeply held restrictions within the body in a way that the client can integrate both in the moment and over time.”

Murphy says that she uses ZB in almost every bodywork session she offers. “Whether I am using ZB as a straight protocol or not, ZB helps integrate and strengthen any changes in the patient’s system, whatever the modality.”

What Can ZB Do for You?

We see only a partially accurate picture of ZB if we merely list the ailments it treats. In reality, though, ZB helps to resolve back pain, musculoskeletal aches and pains, headaches, digestive disorders, and emotional imbalance (to name a few), ZB follows the traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) model. In other words, ZB treats the whole person, not just the disease. As with acupuncture, the goal is to bring the client’s body back into balance and from that point, the body corrects many of its own ailments. ZB brings the body back into balance structurally and energetically, which consistently makes for happier, healthier clients.

Because ZB has the unique quality of touching bone energy specifically, it also affects mental functioning, according to the TCM model. “The way you perceive yourself and your world becomes clearer,” said Robert Alimo, a certified Zero Balancer and industrial rehabilitation specialist at Mercy Hospital in Chicago. “I feel more stable, more integrated,” Oruch said of his own ZB experiences. “It has helped sustain me through difficult times,

and I know myself better.”

And Oak Park, Illinois schoolteacher, Mary Alice Dacosse, said, “After a third Zero Balancing (session), I could breathe easier, had a clearer focus and felt back on track with my life. I limped less as my muscles relaxed. I felt more empowered. I felt ZB was working with me, not controlling me. Perimenopause felt like something that overcame me, something that happened to me. I felt that ZB brought it more into focus so that I can accept it. ZB does not give me a euphoric feeling. It’s a subtle transformation, and one you feel you are in communion with, not one that overtakes you.”

Rajiv Kochhar

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