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Zero Balancing

Phil Greenfield provides an introduction to Zero Balancing, a gentle form of bodywork that aims to enhance the relationship between body energy and body structure

Zero Balancing is a bodywork therapy system that employs a hands-on, nondiagnostic style, with a primary focus on touching bone rather than soft tissue. The gentleness of Zero Balancing belies its depth and potency. It has the potential to facilitate greater harmony between a person and their body, promoting ease and comfort during movement, a greater level of freedom for emotional expression, and enhanced clarity of mind. These qualities offer a person a much greater level of stability in the face of life's incessant changes and challenges. The stated aim of Zero Balancing bodywork is to 'enhance the relationship between body energy and body structure'. This relationship is similar to that which exists between the wind and the sail of a boat. When the relationship between wind and sail is in good order, the ride through the water will be both effortless and exhilarating. However, if the sail is tacked too tight, even a gentle breeze may turn the boat over; too loose, and movement through the water may be sluggish or non-existent. An experienced and skilful sailor can make effective use of even a minimal amount of wind energy. Similarly, in the human 'boat', if body structure and body energy are working together in harmony, the various aspects of our lives should become easier to navigate, and our use of energy will be more economical.

How can a bodywork system offer this breadth and depth of positive change?

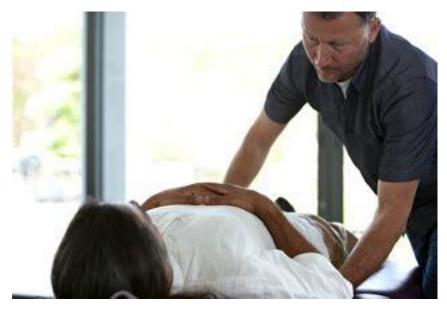
Primarily, Zero Balancing elicits profound relaxation at the very deepest level of the body's structural framework. Because the practitioner's touch is focused specifically towards bone and joint structures, the potential release of tension involves the very deepest aspects of the body's musculature. These muscles, which are generally inaccessible to soft tissue intervention, along with the bones and joints of the skeleton, are responsible for dealing with those forces coursing through the body that are associated with positional stability, and the body's relationship with gravity. Additionally, this deep musculature is often where the adverse effects of a person's response to stress are to be found, and also where the subtle initiation of body movement takes place.

Where did Zero Balancing originate?

Zero Balancing was developed during the mid-1970s by American medical doctor and osteopath, Dr Fritz Smith. Previously, whilst Dr Smith was practicing medicine in California, he had an experience of acupuncture that seriously challenged the medical model by which he practiced. As a result, he subsequently travelled to England and studied traditional acupuncture to master's level with the renowned Professor JR Worsley in Leamington. Later, during time in India studying meditation, Dr Smith pondered his training and experiences, and noted to himself that human beings appeared to be in possession of two 'bodies': a structural body and a 'body of energy'. Both of these seemed to have a relevant and described anatomy, and both benefited from being well organised and balanced within their own parameters. However, it seemed to be the healthy relationship between these two bodies that was the crucial factor for maintaining vitality and robust health. Referring to his extensive knowledge of the skeleton gleaned from osteopathy, Dr Smith proposed that there were certain joints within the skeleton where the relationship between energy and structure (wind and sail) was at its most poignant. He termed these joints foundation and semi-foundation

joints: the sacroiliac joint, tarsal joints of the foot, intervertebral and costovertebral joints. These joints have a much greater role in the transmission of energy (forces) than they do with the process of wilful locomotion, and they are the joints of particular interest to the Zero Balancing practitioner.

What does a typical session involve?



During a Zero Balancing treatment, the client remains fullyclothed and passive in the supine position on a massage couch. The session follows a wholebody protocol that typically lasts between twenty and thirty-five minutes. The practitioner manually evaluates

the client's body, noting areas of restriction, reluctance or absence of congruity. Particular attention is paid to the quality and 'feel' of bone and surrounding soft tissue, and the ease or lack of mobility in the small movements of the foundation and semi-foundation joints.

Zero Balancing fulcrums are then applied by engaging and holding the joint structures in specific positions, which are maintained in stillness for just a few seconds. Both the practitioner and the client may be aware of changes occurring within the client during each stationary position, either locally around the engaged area, or more globally as the body accepts the offering of the fulcrum and undergoes a more widespread re-organisation.

Between fulcrums, it may be suitable to provide brief rest periods to offer the client a chance to adjust and orient themselves to their new internal landscape. The state of deep relaxation elicited during a Zero Balancing session is not sleep-like, but more akin to the 'heightened awareness' reported during meditation. Clients often report a feeling of deep refreshment after the session, and upon returning to a vertical position clients commonly describe a feeling of tallness, an easy buoyancy in the gait, and an experience of 'grounded expansiveness'. The name Zero Balancing originated from a comment made after a session with Dr Smith, where the client said that they felt 'balanced - back to zero'.

Who might benefit from treatment?

There are many potential benefits of Zero Balancing. Clients commonly report a reduction in body pain, enhanced flexibility and posture, relief from the effects of

stress, improvements in relationships, and increased resilience in the face of the rapidly changing circumstances of life. Zero Balancing employs a particular type of touch called 'interface', which is unambiguous, precise and establishes clear boundaries between the client and practitioner. For those clients who may have suffered disrespectful or damaging touch from others during the



course of their lives, receiving touch from another person at interface may be deeply restorative. For the practitioner, such clear boundaries help to prevent the 'draining' of energy when performing multiple sessions, while the technique itself offers therapists a relatively effortless way to promote well-being for both their clients and themselves.

Contraindications

There are few contraindications to Zero Balancing, however women in the first trimester of pregnancy, clients with acute illness, an active cancer diagnosis, or those recovering following fractures or surgery would be advised not to receive Zero Balancing at that time.

Training

The basic Zero Balancing protocol is taught over a five-day workshop (Core I). Zero Balancing is generally taught to therapists who already hold an existing qualification, as the content of the Core I workshop presupposes a level of anatomical familiarity and body handling experience, although those with no relevant experience may attend at the discretion of the instructor.

Students are advised to practise skills learned during Core I workshop with 'well' people, and then to follow up with a Core II workshop a few months later before incorporating Zero Balancing sessions into their existing practice.

Any student who has taken the Core I workshop may join the Zero Balancing Certification Programme, which involves self-guided learning over a maximum

three-year period, and an opportunity to develop a deeper skill and understanding of Zero Balancing. The certification student works with an assigned mentor, completes essays and case studies, and is required to attend an advanced course with Dr Smith during his annual visit to the UK. The title 'Zero Balancer' is reserved for graduates of the certification programme.

Further information

For more information on Zero Balancing, and to view current training schedules in the UK, please visit www.zerobalancinguk.org



Phil Greenfield has been a bodywork practitioner since 1992. A graduate of the McTimoney Chiropractic School in Oxford, he certified as a Zero Balancer in 1997 and as a teacher of Zero Balancing in 2004. His book, Unravelling - Letting Go, Getting Well, was published by TrueAlignment in 2010. For more details of Phil's Zero Balancing Core Workshop teaching schedule, please visit www.corealignment.co.uk

Pictures: Paige Birnie