

Good

WORDS LUCY SLIGHT

Vibrations

From crystal bowls to tuning forks and even your favourite album, sound healing offers a holistic alternative to reducing stress, creating harmony in the body and enhancing your wellbeing. Could this practice cure what's ailing you?

It's 6am and I'm lying on a yoga mat on Mudjimba Beach on Australia's Sunshine Coast. Around me I can hear waves gently crashing, seagulls chirping and the light breathing of the people lying beside me. Louder still are the twinkling chimes, the eerie swirl of Tibetan singing bowls and the deep, spiritual sounds of Swami Govindananda as he guides us through a morning meditation. This was some four years ago now, and I still remember the peaceful feeling as the vibrations of the bowls and sporadic melody of the Eastern instruments travelled through my body. I'm not being dramatic when I say if everyone on the planet did this every morning, the world would be a lot brighter.

The experience I had on the beach is what's known as a sound bath – an ancient healing practice that creates

soundscapes to aid in the relief of stress, anxiety and disease (or dis-ease) in the body. Think of it as the best-ever power nap – one that leaves you feeling the opposite of groggy. Essentially, sound healing is all about using vibration to help the body back to its coherent harmonic state through the use of instruments and voice. Instruments used in the practice can include crystal bowls, Tibetan bowls, Shamanic drums, koshi wind chimes, Native Indian-style flutes and tuning forks, all of which create not only sound, but also vibrational frequencies that the body is able to respond to on different levels.

“All things have a vibration – from the chair we sit in, to our bodies and our thoughts, beliefs and emotions – and all things have their own resonance, a specific

frequency at which they vibrate,” says Yee Ley Lau, a Wellington practitioner of vibrational medicine who has been practicing sound healing for more than 10 years and is trained in several other healing modalities. “Solid matter does not exist as such, but at the atomic level everything is in constant movement, and therefore vibrating.” By using sound as a tool, Yee Ley says she's able to assist a person back to their natural harmony.

One of the most interesting tools Yee Ley uses in her one-on-one sessions is the tuning fork, which enables her to physically hear when something in the body isn't vibrating at its usual frequency. She uses one tuning fork or a set of forks to go through a client's energy fields. “I'll hear or feel a difference in the sound of the tuning fork, which means there's an energy pocket or a difference in the energy field,” she says. “I'll repeat and go over that spot again, easing out any kinks.”

Tuning forks can also be placed on the body along the meridian lines commonly used in acupuncture. “That can take a while if you're going through the whole body from top to toe, left to right, until the sound is clearer,” says Yee Ley.

Relaxation is one of the key aims of sound therapy, which has benefits of its own when it comes to stress reduction. “With sound therapy, often the sounds that are made are unfamiliar or not melodic – they don't have a pattern, and we love looking for patterns,” says Yee Ley. “The mind almost gives up looking for a pattern and therefore creates the relaxed state.” She says that any form of relaxation will assist with the body achieving homeostasis, or equilibrium.

Yee Ley's a big believer in the accessibility of sound, and using it in everyday life to create feelings of calm. This could be listening to your favourite music or music that makes you feel relaxed, taking a walk in nature and listening to the sounds around you, or practicing humming. “Just five minutes of humming on a regular basis can lower the blood pressure and heart rate, reduce levels of stress-related hormones, release endorphins and enhance sleep,” she says.

Timaru-based integrative medicine practitioner Dr Tracy Chandler prescribes sound therapy to her patients as part of a stress-management plan, and this includes listening to music. “Everyone's aware of the effect that certain music has on them,” she says. “Some music can subjectively feel annoying and other music relaxing or uplifting. Any stress-management strategy I use is designed to calm down the sympathetic [fight or flight] nervous system and activate the parasympathetic [rest and repair] nervous system. I suggest people find music that makes them feel relaxed and happy, and play it as much as possible.”

Studies have shown sound therapy to have a wide range of benefits beyond stress reduction. A 2012 study endorsed by the Italian Psychogeriatric Association was the first of

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its kind of show that music therapy can provide meaningful support to the management of dementia, while a pilot study published in the *Australian Nursing & Midwifery Journal* showed sound therapy eased agitation among people with dementia. The positive effects of the practice were also published in 2014 in the *International Journal of Nursing Studies*, which looked at the role of nature-based sound therapy in reducing agitation and anxiety in coronary artery bypass graft patients during the weaning off of mechanical ventilation.

Dr Chandler is quick to point out, however, that she's not waiting for science to ‘prove’ the benefits of sound healing in order for her to offer it to her patients as a healing modality. “I feel I'm doing a huge disservice waiting for science to prove quantum healing techniques like sound therapy with the so-called ‘gold standard’ double-blind, randomised, placebo-controlled trials.”

Yee Ley, too, has seen enough healing with her own eyes to know that it's a practice that works when the person receiving the therapy is open to its benefits. “I had one client, an ex-dairy farmer, who did not want to go down the hip-replacement surgery route and wanted to take a different approach,” she says. “Through several sound and energy sessions, together we were able to reduce the physical discomfort his body was experiencing, and help him gain better sleep, go for longer walks and carry out everyday activities with greater ease.” Another person, she says, had been experiencing sciatica for a long while but after just one sound bath was able to get up off the floor and comfortably walk to her car. “A year later, she's still pain free.”

If your interest has been piqued, a sound bath is the perfect way to try sound therapy in a group environment, which many find less intimidating than a one-on-one session to start with. “My way of working is to invite light into people's lives so that they can make inspired choices to generate a better way of living,” says Yee Ley. “Offering intentional sound as a way to do that makes it more accessible to many.

“When we're in harmony with ourselves, we can gravitate towards those we resonate with and create beautiful symphonies together that we call our reality. And, oh my, there are many realities to play in!” •

LISTEN TO YEE LEY'S SONIC TONIC AUDIO TRACKS AT YEELEYLAU.COM/SONIC-TONICS.