

The Amazing Chiropractor Series Moving Forward with Dr. Kenzo Kase

Special Feature Written by Dennis Domarzalski

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Dr. Kenzo Kase expects that when it comes his time to, well, die, he will do so slumping, lurching or somehow moving forward.

The 67-year-old inventor of the Kinesio Taping® Method and Kinesio® Tex Tape won't be able to help himself. He has always moved forward—never backwards—in his 35-year career as a chiropractic doctor and medical researcher, and he won't change character when the time comes.

It has been that moving forward and questioning things, especially in his chiropractic practice and in the area of human health and well being that drove Dr. Kase to develop his tape and taping method, which is used on every continent of the earth.

“Everybody probably thinks that I’m strange. It’s because I think a little bit too fast. I’m always looking for something,” Dr. Kase said on an August, 2010, trip to work with Kinesio’s U.S. operation in Albuquerque, New Mexico. “I’m eager to find new things because there are so many unknown matters for us, especially for health conditions.”

His unorthodox thinking includes challenging conventional medical wisdom, which he has always done.

Kase pointed out that medical publications follow certain types of accepted advice. “They say ‘Keep your body warm.’” When followed too closely, he noted “That is dangerous. The elevation of temperature in the body may cause necrosis, which is cell death. Cells die when the body temperature goes higher. Exercise makes the body temperature higher. Hot baths make the body temperature higher and [so does] stimulation.” Kase advised care and moderation when raising body temperature. “I always have to say, ‘Put your body in cold water. Put an ice pack on your head.’ All those things come from common sense.

“As you get older and approach 70 years old, your body temperature gets higher because of the physiology of the body and chemically the body cannot metabolize, so the body temperature goes up. That is why if you fly on an airplane, say to a foreign country, you get jet lag. You can prevent it by jumping in cold water. After I have a long flight I go into cold water and I don’t get jet lag and then I can sleep well.”

Dr. Kase also explained, “People say that high salt leads to high blood pressure, and so everybody says, ‘Don’t take salt.’ Well, I say that salt is very important for health. When someone goes to the emergency room for major trauma, the first thing they always do is give them salt. At the cellular level, if we don’t have enough salt, the cell may be damaged.

“But salt is important, and so is sugar. Their levels have to be in balance for our cells and bodies to thrive. Without enough salt, sugar levels rise and that may lead to diabetes, which is much more dangerous than eating a little salt.”

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In this modern world, he feels we should remain aware of the impact of the environment around us. As humans increasingly live bunched together in urban areas, we are subject to bad air and other byproducts of city life. He has no problem with people smoking a little, drinking in moderation and exercising only a little as a defense against the toxins we passively breathe and imbibe. The danger would come from an unprepared immune system, from an excess of any

bad habit, or from overdoing our efforts at fitness.

Dr. Kase believes that the body must be mildly stimulated—often with things that are considered unhealthy by doctors—in order to remain healthy and ward off diseases.

“If someone has high blood pressure, generally a doctor will advise to not stimulate the body because that will increase blood pressure,” Dr. Kase said. “But that type of advice will cause the opposite reaction. If you keep the body safe all the time, it will not be prepared for danger. If we are always in a safe environment, we won’t be prepared for when the danger comes.”

Kenzo Kase didn’t start out to be a chiropractor. He grew up in Tokyo, a sickly child.

“I was very weak at age six or seven. I couldn’t attend physical education classes because I had pneumonia, tuberculosis, kidney infections and all kinds of allergies. I was told by doctors not to inhale too much dust,” Kase recalled.

His grandmother was a Japanese natural healer who used herb therapy and acupuncture on her grandson. He recalled:

“She would burn dried herbs on the skin around my belly button. The idea is that if you burn the skin a little, the body tries to heal the burning area and that stimulates the body to renormalize.”

By his teens, Kase was stronger. He enrolled in Tokyo’s Meiji University and decided on a career in business. After graduation he went to work for a large Japanese railroad company, where he was one of 20,000 employees. Over a five-year period he worked in the public relations, real estate, insurance and travel departments.

“Then I quit,” Kase laughed. “I could always see more into the future. I suggested some things to the company to prepare for the future, but they didn’t. So I thought, ‘Now what am I going to do?’ I thought about being a chiropractor. We had only three chiropractors in Japan after World War II and I figured I would be the fourth and I thought to myself: ‘That would be good!’”

It wasn’t quite that simple. Kase married at age 24, and his wife’s father was one of those first three chiropractors in Japan.

“When I saw him for the first time he worked so hard on one patient,” Kase said of watching his father-in-law treat a patient. “It was 45 minutes to an hour. He was sweating so bad. I thought, ‘Well, that’s not a real good profession.’”

How wrong he was. Although his father-in-law worked hard, Kase was impressed with his concern for patients. Eventually he himself enrolled in the National College of Chiropractic (now National University for the Health Sciences) in Lombard, Illinois. After graduating in 1974 he set out to help heal bodies. He became the fourth chiropractor in Japan to have graduated from a U.S. chiropractic college, and an acupuncturist.

Always the observer, thinker and visionary, Kase soon realized that he wanted to do more for his patients than adjust their spines and joints. He began searching for a taping method that would help heal traumatized tissue and provide muscle and joint support.

He tried various traditional sports taping methods, but found they reduced the patient’s range of motion and sometimes inhibited the healing of traumatized tissue.

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After a whole lot of tries, Kase came up with Kinesio® Tex Tape, an elastic type of tape that is about the thickness and weight of human skin. The tape, which stretches to approximately 140 percent of its own length, moves with the skin and muscles, does not trap body heat and sweat and can be worn in the shower. It lifts the skin, which promotes the free flow of body fluids, and helps muscles contract. It is the over-stretching of muscles that leads to injuries, Kase added.

After decades of improvements, Kinesio® Tex Tape is now used to treat a variety of orthopedic, neuromuscular, neurological and medical conditions. Kase uses it to relieve headaches, reduce wrinkles, heal cuts and burns, treat dogs and horses, as well as to treat cerebral palsy patients. It seems as if he finds a new use for it on a daily basis.

The tape is innovative, but by itself it isn’t magic. Medical practitioners undergo intense training in the Kinesio Taping® Method, which trains them how to recognize what is going on with a patient’s body and how to apply the tape for maximum healing performance.

Kinesio Taping® is now used to treat lymphedema. Kase explained how that use came about:

“It was five or six years after I first invented the taping method. An orthopedist doctor used my tape and method and he showed a slide at a symposium and said he could reduce hematomas by taping. He put the tape on a bruise, and shortly afterward, the bruise was gone. I thought, ‘That’s wonderful! How come?’ Then I realized that the tape could open up the capillary area between the epidermis and the dermis and it helped increase drainage. Then I figured that if it helped with hematomas, we could use it for the lymphedema.

“The lymph node system is kind of like a washing machine system. The fluids flow a certain way throughout the body and flush out impurities. It’s when the flow of lymphatic fluids is obstructed that problems occur. So, if there is a swelling of the lymph node on one side of the body, we will tape the opposite side in order to get the lymphatic fluids flowing to the healthy side.”

When it comes to patients, Kinesio has pretty much seen them all, including athletes, infants, horses, dogs and flamingos.

“I treat a lot of dachshunds. They tend to get herniated discs because their bodies are too long; they’re over-stretched. Normally, people won’t do surgery on them because it is too expensive, and if the pain is too severe, they put the dog to sleep. I apply the tape right over the hair in a certain direction and the dogs respond well.”

In the U.S., only medical practitioners are trained to apply the tape, and patients are not generally encouraged to tape themselves. Practitioners explain to patients how the tape works, especially as it relates to muscle contraction. But Kase, ever the healer, believes that “everybody should be able to learn because it is not dangerous to wear and it is effective for many emergency cases, bruising, slight burning and mosquito bites. If someone has a mosquito bite, we put the tape on and they don’t feel the scratching. Then, in 15 minutes, all the swelling is gone.”

Kase suggested that practitioners should try applying the tape before doing any extremity adjusting.



“First they should try the Kinesio® Tape, and many times they won’t have to do the adjustment. This won’t be a good answer [for some chiropractors] but that is the answer I have,” Kase explained. First they should try Kinesio Tape and then reassess the patient to determine whether an adjustment is still necessary. “You can also put the tape on and then adjust. Sometimes when we adjust we over-adjust. If you put the tape on before you adjust you will get a more gentle adjustment.”

When asked which two or three conditions he has had the most success in treating with his tape, Kase laughed.

“It is hard to tell,” he admitted, “because it is not only a couple. There is lymphedema, headaches, bruises, chest congestion, lower back pain, muscle strains. If I put the tape on the anterior diaphragm, that will help relieve chest congestions. In Japan we do a lot of organ taping—kidney, liver and spleen. There we use it for asthma and menstrual problems and pain.”

The tape is used for a wider variety of ailments in Japan and some other countries than it is in the U.S., which, with its Western medical culture, tends to dismiss natural remedies or demand expensive studies as to their effectiveness, Kase said.

The world’s top athletes use Kinesio® Tex Tape, including NBA basketball star Kevin Garnett, Japanese tennis star Kimiko Date, and, at the 2010 World Cup games in South Africa, most of the Scandinavian soccer players.

It was when the Japanese volleyball teams wore the tape in the 1988 Seoul Summer Olympics that it became a sensation in Japan.

In 2010, middle schools in Japan adopted the Kinesio Taping® Method as part of the required first-aid curriculum.

In more than 30 years of taping, Kase has had famous and memorable patients, but none who stand out as much as the seven-year-old cerebral palsy patient that he treated in the summer of 2010. The boy’s parents had come to Japan from Canada for a vacation (the mother is Japanese) and asked Kase if he could do something for their wheelchair-bound son. They had heard of Kase’s work and wanted the best for their child.

“When he came to see me his left hand was folded and contorted, as was his left leg and foot,” Kase said. “I taped his finger from his fingernails up to his wrist, and I taped his toes, too. Ten minutes after I put the tape on his fingers, one of the fingers on his left hand opened up. This hand had always been claw-like, and after 10 minutes it was starting to unwind.

“A couple of days later when they came back his mother told me, ‘He can pull the toilet paper by himself!’ After three treatments he could use a camera. He could hold the camera and push the shutter button with his right index finger. Normally, people with cerebral palsy can’t use their right fingers very well.

“Two weeks after we started he could walk without holding someone’s hands so long as they supported his back. After three weeks he was walking by himself. His attitude had completely changed and he told me that he wanted to compete in the Special Olympics. He had a goal.”

As he charges forward in his career of healing, Kase will keep refining Kinesio® Tape. He continues to develop applications using cryotherapy, extending his firm belief that cold, rather than heat, is beneficial to muscle health. He has developed the “Osteo-Ariser,” a set of soft, fabric-covered mallets that he uses to gently pound and stimulate joints and bones, and he teaches a new method of chiropractic adjustments.

Kase does not only adjust to the spine, he adjusts to the skin, fascia, muscle, ligaments and tendons and finally the joint. These are components of the human body that need to be addressed to keep a healthy joint and spine system. Kase added. “I always adjust to the muscle. It is the muscle that moves the joint. If the muscle is healthy, then the joint is healthy. It is the muscle that pulls the joint off.”

In the meantime, Dr. Kenzo Kase will indulge his one weakness—food—and he will continue to be as he has always been:

An original thinker.

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