

The toes and fingers have it



How an age old practice may possibly improve overall health.

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Yep, the toes and fingers have it. Reflexology, a relatively modern natural therapy that uses energy zones on the hands and feet to provide relief for a variety of illnesses. It is primarily a relaxation technique, which may negate the effects of stress while it helps the body relax. Through the relaxation process, the body is more capable of dealing with the stresses placed on it by daily living and those associated with illness. In essence, reflexology gently nudges the body toward better functioning by improving lymphatic drainage, venous circulation, stimulation to the nerve pathways, and muscle relaxation.

Experts in the field, known as reflexologists, believe that the practice may help overall health. But before we get straight to the matter, here's a brief history of reflexology.

HISTORY

According to the national organization, Reflexology Association of America, the practice of reflexology may have a long history stemming from the distant past. It seems in most ancient cultures there is a tradition of working on the feet to help the body balance itself. Generally, ancient cultures have an oral tradition. However, some evidence of reflexology may be found in artwork. For instance, in Egypt, in the physician's

tomb (2300 B.C.) there can be found a pictograph, which may be evidence of reflexology being applied. In Asia, several examples have also been cited. Modern reflexology is based on the work of two American physicians of the 1920's, Dr. William Fitzgerald and Dr. Joe Shelby Riley, and on that of physiotherapist, Eunice D. Ingham, who developed Fitzgerald and Riley's knowledge into a usable therapy. Calling it, "Foot Reflexology", Ingham took it to the public in the late 1930s and throughout the early 1970s.

The scientific basis to reflexology begins in the last century. In the 1890s, knighted research scientist and medical doctor, Sir Henry Head, demonstrated the neurological relationship that exists between the skin and the internal organs. Nobel Prize winner, Sir Charles Sherrington, proved that the whole nervous system and body adjusts to a stimulus when it is applied to any part of the body. Around the same time in Germany, Dr. Alfons Cornelius observed that pressure to certain spots triggered muscle contractions, changes in blood pressure, variations in warmth and moisture in the body, as well as directly affected the physic processes or mental state of the patient. The Russians, beginning with Dr. Ivan Pavlov and Vladimir Bekhterev, have also been exploring reflex responses in the body for nearly a century.

In the last 30 years, because of Ingham's traveling around the country teaching groups of people her method of reflexology (the Ingham Method), a grassroots following of reflexology emerged.

Evelyne Huegi of the Swiss Clinique in Corona del Mar, performs reflexology often on people referred by medical doctors who need rehabilitation work. For example, she performs reflexology on people either suffering with Plantar-fasciatis heel spurs or those who just want to get the swelling out of their foot.

Huegi's credentials include training at the International Institute of Reflexology, American Board certification, member of International Council of Reflexology, member of the Reflexology Association of America, Director of Education for the International Institute of Reflexology and four years teaching in the US and Europe using the Ingham Method.

"Reflexology brings total relaxation; it can complement any healthcare work. Considering its therapeutic effects, from an anatomical viewpoint, each foot has 33 joints and innervated by thousands of nerves," she explained. "By using specific reflexology techniques, one directly affects the nervous system in a very positive, relaxing way. When the body is relaxed and the nervous system stimulated, healing has a perfect opportunity to take place. Healing comes from the inside out."

Huegi added that reflexology has the ability to bring about a state of relaxation and, because of this, it is able to assist the body's own natural healing to take place. Reflexology is also able to complement other types of healthcare, she said.

"From my own experiences, I have found that reflexology is able to assist everyone from infants right through to the elderly," she said. "It is of benefit whether our lives take active or sedentary roles and it is able to transcend all barriers, emotional, physical and mental."

Reflexology also may reduce stress, induce deep relaxation, improve circulation, cleanse the body of toxins and impurities, balance the whole system, revitalize energy, and is preventive health care, Huegi said.

When she started, Huegi added, "I did not see that the art could be used for more than providing comfort and improving circulation. However, once I began practicing, I started to realize just how powerful the art of reflexology really is and how much potential its application had for profoundly improving a person's overall well-being.

"Most people do not recognize the significant impact that the condition of the feet has on overall well being. The feet are



EVELYNE HUEGI

the foundation of the human physical structure as well as an important foundation of human health. It must be remembered that the relatively small surface area of the feet is responsible for supporting the weight of the entire body," she continued. "The foot is designed to support this weight for an extended period of time without pain and fatigue."

In addition, the feet and legs support the pelvis, which supports the spine. Even a slight misalignment in the feet can cause spinal distortion that not only negatively affects the posture, but has a damaging effect on the nervous system as well, Huegi said.

"The nervous system controls the functions of the organs. The overall health of a person is dependent on the health of the spine, that is directly linked to the feet," she said.

Suzanne MacMillin, 64, of Newport Beach, can relate, as she has been using reflexology since 1998. "I started by going three times per week. First my feet and then on my hands and face after that. I now go every other week."

MacMillin said she believes reflexology helps with whole body wellness. "I have combined it with acupuncture, holistic medications and supplements," she said. "I feel more relaxed and more in-touch with my body. Everything helps at this stage in life."

Another reflexology advocate is Terry Kienzle, 56, of Corona del Mar, who has had foot reflexology sessions periodically for eight years for relief of problem areas in the body.

"I was involved in a traffic accident where I was 'T-boned' at the driver's door. This bounced my head off the inside window resulting in a neck injury at C-4, C-5, and C-6. This pinched the radial nerve, which ran across my upper chest and back, down my arm to my index finger. It was extremely painful, as though someone was trying to push a two-by-four through my left upper chest. The orthopedic doctor had me in a traction device three times a day, plus nerve anti-inflammatory medication and pain-pills. Nothing brought relief, it hurt to breathe, sit, stand or even lie down."

He opted to try reflexology on his feet because nothing else worked. "To my amazement, I finally was able to get some relief! At least for a few hours at a time. By nature, I'm a bit of a skeptic, so that experience made me a believer in the powers of reflexology."

Would Kienzle recommend reflexology to others? "With so many drugs available in a pill-happy society with the promise of curing what ails you, you really owe it to yourself to explore other concepts and help your body heal itself as best it can with minimal intervention from chemicals," he said. **IM**