

Reflexology

Reflexology is massage of the feet or hands that aims to promote healing in other areas of the body. Modern reflexology is based on the principle that the foot has 'reflex' points that correspond to the various structures and organs throughout the body. For example, on the left foot, the tip of the big toe corresponds to the brain's left hemisphere.

Many ancient cultures, including the Egyptians and Chinese, practised foot therapy as a form of healing. In the early 20th century, the Americans Dr William Fitzgerald and physiotherapist Eunice Ingham rediscovered and refined the techniques.

Reflex points

According to the philosophy of reflexology, all the organs, glands and parts of the body have representing reflexes on the feet. Any health problem in the body can usually be detected in the corresponding area of the foot. The left foot generally relates to any organs, glands etc on the left side of the body while the right foot relates to any organs, glands etc on the right side

Practitioners believe that by massaging or stimulating the reflexes using specific techniques there will be a direct effect on the corresponding organ.

A reflexologist may interpret foot marks or problems such as corns and calluses as an indication of a possible health imbalance in the corresponding area of the body.

A range of disorders

Supporters of reflexology believe that it can effectively treat a wide range of disorders including:

- Stress
- Circulation problems
- Impaired immunity
- Digestive disorders
- Hormonal imbalances
- Reproductive problems
- Sleep problems
- Lack of energy
- Oedema (swelling)
- Common childhood complaints such as colic, teething pain and bed-wetting
- Emotional problems.

The procedure

A typical session lasts approximately one hour. The practitioner first asks detailed questions about lifestyle and prior and current medical problems. The patient sits or reclines on a couch with their feet bare, while the practitioner examines the feet before working on all the areas of the feet.

Generally speaking, the greater the degree of tenderness felt by the patient, the more likelihood there will be a possible imbalance in the corresponding area of the body. The practitioner relaxes the feet with gentle massage, and then works on the reflex points using specific techniques. Practitioners are well used to handling feet and apply sufficient pressure so that ticklishness should not be a problem! Reflexology is not meant to hurt, but should be felt. Strong pressure does not necessarily have a greater effect on the reflexes.

Medical evidence is still limited

Foot massage, including reflexology, encourages relaxation and improves circulation in the feet. However, clinical trials on the efficacy of reflexology as treatment for other health problems have produced mixed results. For example:

- **Premenstrual symptoms** – in one study to assess reflexology as treatment for premenstrual symptoms, participants who received weekly therapy reported, on average, a reduction of symptoms by 62 per cent.
- In another study, the benefits of reflexology were no different to the benefits of regular foot massage performed by people with no training in reflexology.

For further information regarding clinical trials and the efficiency of reflexology go to www.reflexology-research.com

General cautions

Treatment for foot problems such as corns, calluses, bunions and ingrown toenails are not in the scope of practise of a Reflexologist and should be treated by a podiatrist. In particular, people with diabetes are prone to serious foot problems and should be guided by their doctor about appropriate treatment. Reflexology can be an excellent therapy for people with diabetes, however if in doubt about your medical condition it is always recommended that you consult with your doctor before seeing a reflexologist.

Reflexologists do not diagnose, prescribe or treat specific conditions. If an imbalance was detected in a particular reflex during a treatment, the practitioner is likely to refer you to a doctor to get checked. Do not stop any medical treatments on the advice of your reflexologist.

Choosing a reflexologist

To find a reputable and qualified reflexologist in your area, contact the Reflexology Association of Australia. All professional practitioners have undergone extensive training, hold a current Level 2 first aid certificate, have professional indemnity insurance and can provide you with a professional receipt that you can use to claim back part of the treatment from participating private health insurance companies.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Reflexologist
- Podiatrist
- Reflexology Association of Australia Tel. 0500 502 250
- Australian Podiatry Association (Vic) Tel. (03) 9866 5906

Things to remember

- Reflexology is massage of the feet that aims to promote healing in other areas of the body.
- Modern reflexology is based on the principle that the foot has 'reflex' points that correspond to the various structures and organs throughout the body.
- Always consult your doctor if you have a medical condition.

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