

Relief through Reflexology

One of the most effective forms of preventative healthcare and a fantastic way to relax, reflexology is now growing in popularity. Complementary therapist **Susie Ray** explains how reflexology can benefit one and all.

Taking time out from a hectic lifestyle in order to relax is a very modern paradox. Recently it has taken on more significance in light of studies that show that stress causes around 75% of health-related problems as it places a great strain on all of the body's systems, particularly the immune and nervous systems.

A not-so-modern response is Reflexology. Said to have originated in the East some 5000 years ago, reflexology works on the person as a whole; it calms the body and mind as it works on both a physical and mental level. Today, many people encounter stress in their home and work lives but rarely take time for themselves. Reflexology assists the individual to cope with these strains by promoting a deep sense of relaxation and well being. As a complementary therapy, it encourages the body's natural healing processes to combat current disorders, restoring equilibrium in the body by helping it return to a state of homeostasis that may have been lost through stress, injury or illness.

Reflexology tries to find the cause of a problem, rather than simply cure the symptom, helping the body heal itself. Reactions to treatments are unique and vary from person to person, however, the majority report a sense of deep relaxation and calm.

What is Reflexology?

Reflexology is the technique of applying pressure to reflexes on the feet and hands in order to bring about a state of deep relaxation, stimulate the body's own healing processes and help a person return to a position of balance and well-being. It is a non-invasive form of therapy based on the principle that reflexes on the hands or feet correspond to each organ and structure in the body and are linked to these organs by energy channels, zones or meridians. When illness occurs in the body, the corresponding energy channels become blocked. By working on specific reflexes a reflexologist can release energy blockages and restore the free flow of energy, helping relieve and control pain and encourage the body to heal itself.

The beginnings of Reflexology are to be found in the ancient Chinese and Japanese healing arts of acupressure and massage which were used to correct energy fields in the body. The earliest depiction of foot and hand reflexology is a painting found in the Mastaba of Ankhmahor (early pyramid), the pharaoh's vizier, which dates from 2330BC. However, it was not until 1913 that pressure therapy was introduced to the West by American ear, nose & throat consultant, Dr. William Fitzgerald. In the 1930's Eunice Ingham further developed Fitzgerald's work into what is now known as Reflexology, observing that congestion or tension in a part of the body is mirrored in the corresponding part of the foot.

Who does it benefit?

Anyone and everyone can benefit from reflexology and it can bring relief from a wide range of acute and chronic conditions. Modern lifestyles can have negative effects on the body, throwing its systems out of sync. A reflexologist can detect these subtle imbalances by touch and the visible appearance of the feet and will work to restore the body's natural balance. The practice can be used to treat a myriad of ailments including back pain, migraines, digestive disorders, stress-related conditions, hormonal imbalances, arthritis and sleep disorders.

Reflexology can be a very effective treatment for infertility problems. There is increasing evidence that sub-fertile women can significantly improve their chances of conception when a method of stress reduction, such as reflexology, is used. Reflexology can work on the body's hormone or endocrine system, to name one, that is often the cause of problems conceiving.

The benefits of reflexology are numerous but is also a great way to unwind, take time out of a hectic schedule or to simply pamper yourself or a friend.

Reflexology and you

At your first treatment a full consultation will be undertaken covering your medical history, lifestyle and why you require treatment. Since everyone is different this information helps the practitioner tailor a course of treatments most suitable to you.

Although many people hold reservations about being ticklish, the pressure that is applied to the feet and hands is very different and is firm and controlled. Even the most ticklish people enjoy themselves!. It is important to note, however, that some reflex points can be a little tender but this will subside and following a treatment most people report a deep sense of relaxation, calm and well being.

There are no dangerous side effects from reflexology but some may experience a 'healing crisis reaction', where a symptom may get worse for a short time no longer than 24 hours, this is caused by the body trying to re-balance itself and re-adjust before it begins to get better.

What to pay and where to go

Costs can vary from around £30 to £60 for an hour long session although shorter half-hour sessions are often available. Dependent on individual requirements, it is often advisable to take a course of treatments to benefit from a cumulative approach. As part of a tailored programme, this is often the best way to treat a particular ailment. A practitioner may suggest weekly or bi-weekly sessions at first before reducing the frequency dependent on the patient's response.

Where to find practitioners in your area

The Association of Reflexologists (www.aor.org.uk) is one of the leading bodies for reflexology in the UK and offers a wealth of information. It aims to help maintain a high standard of practice and patient care to promote reflexology, with all members bound by the Association's Codes of Practice and Ethics. Their website lists a register of qualified practitioners. Find-A-Reflexologist (www.findareflexologist.co.uk) also provides information and articles, as well as a comprehensive search facility to help locate a reflexologist in your area.

Becoming a reflexologist

Anyone can study reflexology although many schools ask that you are over 18 years of age. The most important qualities you should possess are empathy, a genuine caring for others and an ability to listen. There are many schools throughout the UK offering Association of Reflexologists (AOR) accredited practitioner courses. If you are interested in finding out more on training it is advisable to contact a number of different schools from the *List of Accredited Practitioner Courses* from the AOR website at www.aor.org.uk.

About the author

Susie Ray MAR is a qualified reflexologist and Indian head masseuse, with a special interest in preconception, pregnancy & post natal care reflexology. Working out of three central London clinics as well as with clients in their own homes Susie has also assistant-tutored at the London School of Reflexology where she trained. www.susieray.com