

WHY YOU SHOULD TRY Reflexology

How this holistic therapy can help restore inner calm and improve your wellbeing

The benefits of reflexology are well known and yet a large proportion of people claim it's not for them, without even trying it. Granted, we don't all like this part of our body being touched, but as our feet bear the weight of our whole body and propel us forward in our day-to-day lives, surely they deserve a little attention?

Holistic foot massage has been practised for thousands of years – it's thought that reflexology was developed in China as early as 4,000BC, and it was also championed by the ancient Egyptians and various native American tribes. It's based on the idea that your feet (and hands and ears to a certain extent) are like mini maps of your body – with every organ and section interlinked to a corresponding region of the feet. By stimulating certain points, called reflexes, it's believed that therapists can help revitalise energy pathways, reduce blockages and trigger the body's natural healing process, thereby helping address different issues.

Here's why you should try it...

IT CAN HELP RESTORE CALM

Any sort of therapy that involves massaging or stimulating areas of the body can help with relaxation, and reflexology is no different. Studies have suggested that massage can not only help lower blood pressure but also the levels of the stress hormone cortisol in our bodies and for this reason, reflexology is gaining a stellar reputation among stressed-out individuals. As well as reporting a release of tension, many people say that

reflexology helps them sleep better, too. Sign us up now!

IT CAN BOOST YOUR CIRCULATION

Always suffering from cold feet? Our sedentary lifestyles mean we don't necessarily use our feet muscles properly and this, coupled with tight shoes and socks, can hamper the circulation in this area. Problems with blood flow are even more noticeable in winter but because reflexology focuses on massaging and applying pressure to the feet, it can temporarily boost circulation to this area.

IT COULD OFFER EFFECTIVE PAIN-RELIEF

According to the results of a 2013 study, reflexology could be as effective as painkillers as a method of pain relief. Researchers at the University of Portsmouth found that people who were undergoing reflexology felt about 40 percent less pain, and were able to stand pain for about 45 percent longer.

Dr Carol Samuel, who led the study, said the results suggested that reflexology could be used to complement conventional drug therapy in the treatment of conditions associated with pain such as osteoarthritis, backache and cancers.

"It is likely that reflexology works in a similar manner to acupuncture by causing the brain to release chemicals that lessen pain signals," she explained.

Many people who use reflexology also report an ease in headaches and migraines and PMS and menopause symptoms, too.

IT CAN HELP WITH MOBILITY

Reflexology involves a variety of 'warm ups' and 'mobilisation' techniques, which are designed to help relax your

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feet for the treatment, as well as improve movement in your feet and ankles. This can be particularly useful for those who have to stand a lot, or have poor mobility in their feet and ankles.

IT COULD HELP WITH FERTILITY

Many couples trying to conceive find reflexology beneficial and there are countless stories in the news of women who claim that the treatment helped them fall pregnant. While there has been no conclusive scientific research into this, reflexology is believed to help due to the balancing effects of the therapy and the fact that it helps to promote relaxation at a time that can be particularly stressful.

Similarly, many pregnant clients also find reflexology relaxing and helpful at a time when they are going through major physiological and emotional changes.



YOU CAN TRY IT AT HOME

While going to a trained reflexologist will allow you to enjoy a personalised treatment that's designed to help address specific issues with your body, there are certain techniques you can employ at home.

For your own mini foot treatment, start by relaxing your feet – gently kneading them and pressing them softly to soothe the muscles. Using your thumb inch it up your foot, 'walking' it up to the top of your toes in a caterpillar-like fashion. Now depending on what you would like to focus on, press on one or more of the following reflex points.

- **For your head/brain** – the top of each toe. Pressure here can promote clarity and positive thinking.
- **For your pituitary or 'master gland'** – the centre of your big toe.

This can stimulate and balance your hormone secretions.

- **For your pineal gland** – the outer side of the big toe. This part of your foot can help with the secretion of melatonin which impacts on our circadian rhythm/sleep cycle.
- **For your neck** – the base of the big toe. Release tension by focusing on this part of your feet.
- **For your chest/lungs** – the pad of your foot. Pressure here can calm your breathing.
- **For your solar plexus** – underneath the pad of your foot in the centre. This part of your foot can help encourage relaxation and the release of tension.

Finish by gently kneading your feet all over, and then lightly run your fingertips down your skin in a feathery motion.

"I FIND REFLEXOLOGY THE ULTIMATE RELAXER"

Fifty-three-year-old Helen from West Sussex has been enjoying reflexology treatments for more than 12 years. Here's why she's such a fan of this holistic therapy...

"I first discovered complementary therapies when I went to a therapy taster session at a colleague's house. At the time I was suffering from sciatica, as I have a lower back problem that stems from a car accident and years of horse riding. After just a short massage treatment from Alison, the therapist there, I could feel the pain start to subside. I have had other treatments for this condition, but nothing that provided relief so quickly

"I now have regular reflexology treatments with Alison as I see it as the ultimate relaxer. I also find that it alleviates the nerve pain I experience from an old running injury, and the arthritis in my big toe. My treatment not only provides me with deep relaxation, but helps me to care for my overall health and wellbeing.

"The holistic aspect of reflexology is very important. There have been times when I have been under a lot of stress, or my health has been poor - both mentally and physically - and Alison has been able to adjust the treatment to help provide me with the support I need.

"I find it is a much less aggressive way of dealing with problems. Both reflexology and other forms of complementary therapies are supportive and don't have the same side-effects as drugs or other physical treatments. In addition, any problem I have is not treated in isolation to other aspects of my life and health, so they provide broader support to my overall health and wellbeing."

Helen's therapist Alison is a member of the Federation of Holistic Therapists (the FHT). For more information or to find a therapist near you visit fht.org.uk