

TAKING CHARGE OF YOUR HEALTH & WELLBEING

Reflexology



What is reflexology?

Reflexology is the application of appropriate pressure to specific points and areas on the feet, hands, or ears. Reflexologists believe that these areas and reflex points correspond to different body organs and systems, and that pressing them has a beneficial effect on the organs and person's general health. For example, reflexology holds that a specific spot in the arch of the foot corresponds to the bladder point. When a reflexology practitioner uses thumbs or fingers to apply appropriate pressure to this area, it affects bladder functioning.

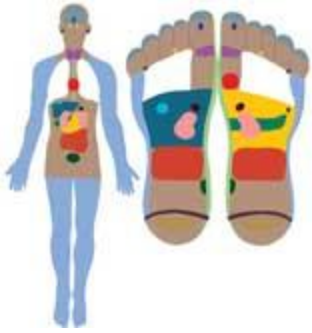
Although reflexology is not used to diagnose or cure health disorders, millions of people around the world use it to complement other treatments when addressing conditions like **anxiety**, asthma, **cancer** treatment, **cardiovascular** issues, **diabetes**, **headaches**, kidney function, PMS, and sinusitis.

Reflexology is growing increasingly popular across Europe and Asia as both a complement to other treatments and as a preventive measure. One example is Denmark, where various municipalities and companies have employed reflexologists since the early '90s.

According to several studies, this practice in Denmark has resulted in reduced sick leave and absenteeism (and significant economic savings for the employers). Employees have consistently reported complete or partial improvement in conditions where they sought reflexologists' help and even relief for additional problems related to stress. In one municipal district, almost one-third of the employees reported greater satisfaction with their jobs after completing six sessions with a reflexologist.

Where are the reflexology points and areas?

In reflexology theory, points and areas on the feet, hands, and ears correspond to specific organs, bones and body systems. Practitioners access these points on the feet and hands (bottom, sides, and top) and the ear (both inside as far as the finger can reach and outside) to affect organs and systems throughout the entire body.



Maps of reflex points have been passed between practitioners across the globe. Understandably, there is not agreement among all reflexologists on all points; however, general agreement does exist on major reflex points. Some scientific documentation of linkages between the skin and internal organs also exists.

To represent how the body systems correspond to one another, reflexologists use reflexology "maps." A good example of a reflexology map exists for the feet. Each foot represents a vertical half of the body:

- The left foot corresponds to the left side of the body and all organs, valves, etc. found there.
- The right foot corresponds to the right side of the body and all organs found there. For example, the liver is on the right side of the body, and therefore the corresponding reflex area is on the right foot.

The illustration to the right shows a reflexology map for the feet. For a map of the hands, see www.reflexology-research.com

A reflexologist may perform a general, integrated session, or may focus on specific problem areas on the feet, hands or ears. For example, if time is limited and the person really needs to relax, the reflexologist may choose just to work on the ears.

Whatever the approach, the reflexologist attempts to release congestion or stress in the nervous system and balance the body's energy.

How does reflexology relate to other therapies?

Acupuncture and acupressure: Reflexology is similar to **acupuncture** and **acupressure** in that it works with the body's vital energy through the stimulation of points on the body. However, acupuncture/acupressure points do not always coincide with the reflex points used in reflexology.



Reflexology and acupressure are both "reflex" therapies in that they work with points on one part of the body to affect other parts of the body. While reflexology uses reflexes that are in an orderly arrangement resembling a shape of the human body on the feet, hands, and outer ears, acupressure uses over 800 reflex points that are found along long thin energy lines called meridians that run the length of the entire body.

Massage: Some people confuse reflexology with massage. While both massage and reflexology use touch, the approaches are very different.

- **Massage** is the systematic manipulation of the soft tissues of the body, using specific techniques (for example, tapping, kneading, stroking, and friction) to relax the muscles.
- Reflexology focuses on reflex maps of points and areas of the body in the feet, hands, and ears using unique micromovement techniques such as thumb or finger walking and hook and backup to create a response throughout the body.

In short, massage therapists work "from the outside in," manipulating specific muscle groups or fascia to release tension. Reflexology practitioners see themselves as working "from the inside out" -- stimulating the nervous system to release tension.

Another difference between massage and reflexology is that a client will stay fully clothed for a reflexology session except for removing footwear, whereas clients remove clothing for a massage session.

Where does reflexology come from?

Because reflexology is an ancient practice, its origin and history is difficult to track. However, reflexology is thought to have been passed down through an oral tradition, and possibly first recorded as a pictograph on the Egyptian tomb of Ankhamor in 2330 BC along with other medical procedures.

Reflexology symbols are also thought to be recorded on the feet of statues of Buddha in India and later China. The Chinese classic, the Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine, which was written around 1,000 BC, has a chapter on "Examining Foot Method" and is the beginning of discussions in print about the connection of life force and points and areas on the feet.

It is believed that Marco Polo translated a Chinese massage book into Italian in the 1300s, thus introducing reflexology and massage to Europe. In 1582, a book on an integral element of reflexology called zone therapy was first published in Europe by Dr. Adamus and Dr. A'tatis.

In the United States, William H. Fitzgerald, MD, who is frequently referred to as the father of reflexology, wrote in 1917 about ten vertical zones that extended the length of the body. He found that the application of pressure to a zone that corresponded to the location of an injury could serve as relief of pain during minor surgeries.

Dr. Fitzgerald's work was expanded by Dr. Shelby Riley, who developed a map of horizontal zones going across the body and a detailed map of reflex points on the feet and hands. He also suggested pressure points on the outer ear.

Eunice Ingham, a physiotherapist who worked for Dr. Riley, is another prominent figure in the development of reflexology. In her research with zone therapy's pressure points, she found the feet to be the most sensitive and responsive. She developed the foot maps still in use today and introduced reflexology practices to the non-medical community in the 1930s. Ms. Ingham also designed one of the most commonly used reflexology charts, which has since been refined by her nephew, Dwight Byers, at the International Reflexology Institute.

In 1957, Dr. Paul Nogier recorded a reflex map of points on the outer ear. His work has been expanded by Oleson and Flocco and is now being taught as part of an integrated approach to hand, ear and foot reflexology.

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