

## Incorporating Reflexology into Your Life

### Footprints for Health

You walk on them all day, but did you know your feet do more than carry you from one place to the next? They also have a unique connection to balanced health and well-being. In a form of bodywork known as reflexology, the feet are said to contain reflex areas that mirror and connect to all parts of the body--and pressure on these points can actually influence your state of health.

### What is Reflexology

The roots of reflexology draw, in part, from the ancient healing art of foot massage, practiced the world over, from Asian and Egyptian civilizations to tribal communities of the Americas. Early archaeological digs have revealed statues

relaxation technique. Using the thumb, finger, and hand, gentle pressure is applied to reflex areas of the feet in order to decrease stress and bring the body into equilibrium. While some reflexologists also apply treatment to the hands and ears, the foot--with its greater quantity of sensitive nerve endings--is considered the most amenable to this approach.

Although simplistic in application, the effects of the treatment can be profound. Through activation of nerve receptors in the hands and feet, new messages flood into the body system, changing its tempo and tone. In essence, the foot or hand becomes a conduit for sharing information throughout the



The foot has a greater quantity of sensitive nerve endings than other body parts.

of Buddha in China and Japan, and Vishnu (a Hindu god) in India, depicting markings of specific areas on the feet. But it has only been within the last century that this work has established a foothold, so to speak, in Western practice.

As we know it today, reflexology is viewed primarily as a stress reduction or

body. Function in the connecting area is improved and, at the same time, the body experiences overall relaxation and benefits to the circulation and elimination systems. When the body's systems are at optimal functioning, self-healing is enhanced.

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*When you  
change the way  
you look at  
things – the  
things you look  
at change.*

-Wayne Dyer

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In this sense, reflexology is not a medical treatment for specific symptoms or diseases, but rather a way to facilitate the body's inherent healing power. Therefore, it stands to reason that paying attention to your feet can also be a great preventive measure and one easily incorporated into a daily routine.

How and why reflexology works the way it does is still up for debate. Some say it involves communication through the nervous system; other theories point to opening blockages of chi, or vital energy, in the body. Regardless, scientific studies have documented its benefit for a variety of ailments, ranging from acute disorders to chronic diseases. The majority of reflexology research has come from China where the technique is commonly used in hospitals and homes for both health maintenance, and as adjunct to medical care. Some of the positive findings include reduction of pain, improvement in circulation, release of tension, and improved effectiveness of medication, as well as benefits for diabetes and headaches.

## Fancy Footwork

Kevin Kunz, author of several reflexology books and codirector of the Reflexology Research Project, emphasizes the importance of making reflexology a part of your life. Consistency is key if you expect results, and foot homework is a low-cost, efficient way to extend the benefits of weekly sessions with your reflexologist. The techniques can be practiced even while you're busy doing something else. You can purchase devices such as foot rollers for use under the desk, but even inexpensive homemade devices will do, Kunz says. "You can put a golf ball in a sock, tie it up, and you have a roller. Anything to cause stimulation has a beneficial effect."

Reflexology is also a safe and effective technique for infants and children, soothing their emotions and promoting sleep. Naturally available and noninvasive, this approach can enhance communication between parent and child and aid in developing the child's physical awareness.

## Feedback and Stimulation

According to Kunz, lack of stimulation for the feet is a major problem in our society. We box our feet in shoes and forbid them to traipse the natural environment. Some American feet never even see sunlight, much less travel naked on a forest floor. "The feet carry the body, in more ways than one," Kunz says. "Constant feedback from the feet is needed in order for the body to make the proper responses." There is no challenge for the foot in walking on flat surfaces. Feet crave stimulation, and they were built for a variety of surfaces.

The Japanese, as well as Europeans, have addressed this basic need by creating health pathways to stimulate every part of the foot. "This comes from taki fumi," Kunz says, "to step upon bamboo. Here we call them stroll pathways. The idea is that you stroll along, and as you do, you are strengthening the system. It's great exercise and gives you more endurance."

In Asia, pathways frequently feature cobblestones for stimulation, but a sandy beach or rocky hiking trail can provide variation underfoot.

Whatever path you choose, get off the pavement, free your feet, and let them do their thing. "Over thousands of years," Kunz says, "every culture has discovered it in some shape or form. The foot is it."



Scientific studies have documented the benefits of reflexology for a variety of ailments.

# What is Qi?

A fundamental concept of traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) dating back over 3,000 years, qi (pronounced "chee") is the Chinese word for energy, which also carries with it connotations of air, breath, and life force.

In TCM, it is understood that everything from humans and animals to rocks and trees is filled with qi. This energy facilitates function, communication, and connection and is the uniting force of the universe, as well as the animating life force in all objects.

## Qi in the Body

Qi flows through the body via 14 meridian channels, which run either up or down throughout the body along specific pathways. These pathways deliver energy to organs, structures, and systems in a constant pattern, and when qi is flowing unimpeded along these meridians, a person is said to be in balance.

Illness, injury, stress, and other trauma

can cause blockages along these meridians, thus impairing or stopping the flow of qi and resulting in energy congestion. Several TCM techniques are designed to clear these blockages and restore balance and flow to the body's energy.

## Working with Qi

Along each meridian are points, known as acupoints or pressure points, where these energy blockages are likely to occur. Significant acupoints are also known as trigger points, and these are often starting points for therapists working to clear congested qi.

An important principle of qi is that clearing blockages at certain trigger points will help restore flow and thus impact parts of the body that are connected along the various meridians. For example, this could mean that working on someone's foot might benefit an internal organ like the liver, or benefit his or her heart. This concept further illustrates that qi in the body is

one balanced system in which one imbalance can affect several body parts and even alter emotional states.



Keeping qi in balance.

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# Navigating Online Health Information

Getting medical information on the Internet might be easy, but relying on it can be dangerous--rumors, misunderstandings, biased opinions, and outright lies await. Here are some tips for using the Internet effectively as part of your health care.

## Getting Good Information

"Start at Web resources dedicated to providing only peer-reviewed medical information," says library science expert Sean Eads. "WebMD.com and Healthfinder.gov are two excellent resources where the articles are researched and written by professionals." Eads recommends avoiding websites like Wikipedia or Yahoo! Answers where anyone can provide unverified information.

Other options for information include

AskDrWiki.com, where articles can only be composed and edited by qualified medical professionals. For a more academic viewpoint of conditions, Eads suggests Searchmedica.com, which compiles medical journal articles, clinical trials, and other health magazines into its searchable database.

## Trust the Professionals

Internet sources should not be used in place of health-care professionals, experts say, but rather as a supplemental tool to enable you to be a better advocate for yourself. Gather the knowledge you need to be informed and ask intelligent questions, but remember that consulting a website is not a substitute for a visit to a health-care professional.

One advantage that the Internet does have is its ability to foster connections

between people living with similar conditions. A September 2010 Pew Internet survey shows that 1 in 5 Internet users have sought out someone with the same medical condition they had. Building an online community can allow people to share experiences, and provide support across long distances and in situations where a condition is less common.

## Find a Balance

Recognizing both the benefits and shortcomings of these websites is necessary to utilizing them most effectively. By using the voices of many to become more informed, you can be more involved when listening to the reliable voice of a qualified health professional.

*A mind that is stretched by a new experience can never go back to it's old dimensions.*

--O.W. Holmes

Dirty Dozen: Produce With Most Pesticide

- 1.Apples
- 2.Celery
- 3.Strawberries
- 4.Peaches
- 5.Spinach
- 6.Nectarines (imported)
- 7.Grapes (imported)
- 8.Sweet bell peppers
- 9.Potatoes
- 10.Blueberries (domestic)
- 11.Lettuce
- 12.Kale/collard greens

The rankings come from consumer advocates at the nonprofit Environmental Working Group (EWG), based on pesticide tests from the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the FDA.

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