

## REFLEXOLOGY: ANCIENT HEALING ART & 21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY SCIENCE

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*(First in a Series)*

Reflexology is an ancient art and holistic healing technique – and as such, aims to treat the whole person (mind, body and spirit) with the gentle spark of the body's natural healing processes. In principle, there are numerous energy and nerve pathways that exist throughout the body. The feet and hands are maps of the body with reflex points that correspond to different body areas, organs and glands.

Massaging reflex points and specific areas of the feet (using direct pressure techniques) can spur mental, emotional, physical health and well being within the entire body. It unblocks the pathways inducing a more uninterrupted flow of energy (known as Chi) and natural balance. Reflexology, by itself, has many health benefits. It can be used as a complimentary therapy in unison with other alternative health services (chiropractic, naturopathic, acupuncture, etc.); conventional medicine; and personal wellness plans.

### ORIGINS OF REFLEXOLOGY

Many ancient cultures (Asian, Egyptian, North American Indian and others) used some kind of *foot therapy* to treat disease, illnesses and imbalances. Some type of *treatment process* was known in China and India around 5000 BC. Most historians now agree the acupuncture and Reflexology were originally developed in China from the same tree of knowledge.

It appears that acupuncture emerged and Reflexology became more obscure, or largely forgotten, until the Dark Ages (around 400-500 AD). Remote Asian cultures in Tibet, China and India preserved the ancient traditions. Historical evidence from about 400 BC shows images of *Medicine Buddha* and *Buddha's Footprints* with carved symbols on the hands and feet.

In 1017 AD, Chinese Dr. Wang Wei documented the importance of the feet in treating imbalances and disease. By applying deep pressure in areas of the feet and needles in other parts of the body, he confirmed the strong link between acupuncture and Reflexology. Dr. Wei often noted that the feet were *the most sensitive part of the body*. The feet contained *great energizing areas*. Almost 1000 years later, the Chinese officially recognize Reflexology as an accepted means of preventing disease and preserving health.

The knowledge of Chinese *energy medicine* (based on meridian therapy) and acupuncture was not recognized by the West until 1883 by Dutch doctor Ten Tyne. In central Europe, some form of *foot therapy* was used by the working class, upper class and royalty during the 14<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, it wasn't until the late 1800s when the West discovered a scientific basis for Reflexology.

During the late 1800s, neurological studies and clinical research were conducted throughout Europe showing a strong therapeutic link between neural pathways and reflex points. By the 1920s, two doctors in the U.S. (Drs. Fitzgerald and Riley) had formalized a theory known as *Zone Therapy*. There are ten longitudinal (vertical) neurological and energy zones extending from the head, ending in the fingers and toes. Within these zones lie all glands, organs and muscles in the body.

*(Note: This concept is quite different from Chinese meridian theory. Meridians are energy pathways connecting all glands and organs in the body, culminating in the feet and hands. When the body is balanced and healthy, meridians allow the uninterrupted flow of Chi throughout the entire body. Meridian theory will be discussed in future articles.)*

Each body area, organ and gland is reflected in reflex points that are found on the feet and hands. Reflex points are energy junctions that relay and reinforce energy along the neural pathways and body zones (see body diagram) – passing energy toward the organs, glands and nervous system.

The feet and hands are a reflection of the entire body and its imbalances or congestions. When energy flow is blocked, the imbalance can be found in the reflex points. Reflexology is designed to break up energy blocks and break down crystallized deposits. Through the stimulation/sedation of the nervous system (neural pathways), the circulatory and lymphatic systems – and by the release of toxins – Reflexology promotes the self-healing processes in the body.

Eunice Ingham (Riley's assistant) is widely credited with formalizing the Western practice of Reflexology, calling it *Foot Reflexology*. She believed that the feet were the best location for a therapeutic *reflex response* to stimulate the natural healing processes. Developing the first Western foot charts, she mapped out reflex points on the feet and strategies for health issues (see Foot Reflexology chart).

Much like integrative medicine (blending West and East, modern science with holistic knowledge), Reflexology has gained wider acceptance as an option for better health and vitality. It is an ancient healing art and 21<sup>st</sup> century science.

### **SOME BENEFITS OF FOOT & HAND REFLEXOLOGY**

To locate reflex areas accurately, identify *congested areas* and to properly advise the client – a practical knowledge of body systems, anatomy and physiology is required. A strong intuition is most helpful. Reflexology as a holistic therapy is like a *body tune up*. Numerous American, European and Chinese clinical studies (among others) show strong evidence of health benefits. Those clients with chronic conditions appear to have the best results. Some major benefits of Reflexology are listed below.

Deep Relaxation	Helps Release Toxins/Wastes
Improves Blood Circulation	Relieves Sinuses/Allergies
Lessens Computer Strain	Lymph Flush/Immune Booster
Reduces Chronic Pain	Promotes Energy Vitality
Eases Headaches/Migraines	Speeds Recovery From Illness/Injury
Lowers Inflammation	Opens Neural/Energy Pathways
Joint Mobility/Movement	Helps Plantar Faciitis/Other Foot Conditions

Reflexology is beneficial for improving the function of the endocrine system. It is known for inducing a profoundly deep state of relaxation. As a complimentary therapy, it can be used in conjunction with naturopathic or herbal strategies, conventional medical treatments, chiropractic care, wellness plans and fitness programs.

Specific treatment plans and regularity of sessions are most important in addressing the clients' health issues and well being. Case studies from my practice indicate that Reflexology has helped to improve health, quality of life and enhance the positive effects of wellness plans.

(Future Articles: More on the Benefits of Reflexology, Zone Therapy and Meridian Theory, Reflexology Treatments.)

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