

What are some of the benefits of reflexology, especially as a complement to massage therapy?



COURTESY OF PAULA S. STONE

Paula S. Stone responds:

Reflexology is one of the most popular forms of bodywork, with industry statistics showing about half of massage therapists practice this modality. Reasons for doing so include reflexology's effectiveness at addressing a variety of conditions, and its

portability. (There is no disrobing required; only the feet are bare.) With such notables as natural health-care proponent Andrew Weil, M.D., and Mehmet Oz, M.D., of *The Dr. Oz Show* touting the medical benefits of reflexology, along with articles in consumer and professional health care publications, awareness of this modality is making inroads into the public consciousness.

Reflexology's roots extend 10,000 years to ancient India and about 5,000 years to ancient Egypt. Contemporary reflexology respects traditional principals while incorporating scientific, clinical research and protocols. Reflexologists are trained to see clients holistically, and depending on training, techniques improve physiological and energetic balance.

Reflexology is a form of reflexive therapy. Reflexes are not the vital energy points used in meridian therapy; biopsies of the feet show a reflex to be an area in the tissue composed of nerve fibers, connective tissue and vascular elements. Some reflexes are small, while others are large.

Deposits located in the hypodermis of the skin indicate an anatomical or functional imbalance in the corresponding organ, gland or body part. When a reflex is worked (by pressure, vibration, heat or other method),

a reflexive action occurs in the body often far removed from the location of the reflex. This process is far more than simply seeing a foot or hand reflex map and pressing where someone guesses the reflexes are located.

The whole purpose of reflexology is to provide the body with an extra push in the direction of healing, to allow the body to achieve homeostasis and better health.

In the U.S., distinctions are made between reflexology and other touch modalities. Reflexology is different and distinct from massage in training and application. Foot massage—even with deep-tissue and range-of-motion techniques—is different from reflexology.

Contemporary, professional reflexology requires a high level of precision in technique, in-depth knowledge of pathology and applications of anatomy and physiology to reflexology, keen assessment and clinical



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skills, and the ability to adapt pressure to meet session objectives. To this end, new core reflexology educational programs involve 300 or more hours in instructor-lead and hands-on practice of reflexology.

To work a reflex, in this case on the foot, the professional accurately locates the reflex using the boney structure of the foot, and then skillfully applies pressure using a variety of special techniques. Unique to reflexology, the techniques generally involve using the thumb, fingers and knuckles to apply alternating and sustained pressure on reflexes according to the protocol for the health challenge.

Reflexology protocols are systematic ways to work reflexes to achieve desired outcomes. Reflexologists

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apply protocols based on assessments. Approaches for oncology, high blood pressure, pain management and more are derived from scientifically documented clinical research on the medical benefits of reflexology conducted in hospitals in India, Spain, South America, Western Europe and the U.S.

Reflexology is a wonderful complementary



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therapy for the massage therapist, and rewarding for massage therapists who pursue professional training and certification in reflexology. Some points to note:

1. Reflexology assessment is accurate and fast.

Some professional reflexologists assess the entire body in as little as 15 minutes.

Whole-body assessment identifies areas of tension and imbalance, and provides data to build a session protocol to meet specific client needs. By working areas of imbalance, the body moves immediately toward better homeostasis. This often reduces the time required for massage.

2. Reflexology is indicated when massage is contraindicated.

Perform reflexology immediately following surgery to reduce pain and decrease need for pain medication. Reflexology assists with recovery from injury, since reflexes, not the area itself, are worked.

Reflexology works the reflexes for the entire digestive system from mouth to anus, working many areas inaccessible or contraindicated by massage.

3. Reflexology reflexively works areas of the body or body systems, such as the endocrine system, that are inaccessible by massage.

For example, say a client complains of stomach pain in the lower left quadrant during light-pressure abdominal massage. The reflexologist uses the anatomical-topographical grid to locate and palpate the tender reflex on the left foot. In this case, after the tenderness subsides in the foot, the stomach pain is also gone.

4. Reflexology works areas of the body in short periods of time.

For example, the entire head and its contents are located in the phalanges of both great toes. Working all surfaces of the great toes, nails and deep into the phalangeal joint affects the entire head and neck.

Immediate improvement occurs in nerve supply, blood and lymphatic circulation, and muscle tone. The effects make head-and-neck massage easier and faster, and more comfortable for the client.

5. Reflexology is clinically proven to be beneficial for a

number of health challenges. Scientific studies include, but are not limited to, the benefits of reflexology for: nervous exhaustion; fibromyalgia; migraines and headaches; pain relief; high blood pressure; depression; premenstrual syndrome; and many forms of cancer, including breast and mesothelioma.

There are many applications for reflexology alone and massage alone. The two practiced together, by



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professionally trained therapists, create a powerful combination. The dually licensed or certified professional possesses a depth of understanding that exceeds either modality independently.

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