

reflexology

Reflexology or foot therapy is found in many traditional cultures. The oldest written record is a hieroglyph in a physician's tomb within one of the Egyptian pyramids



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One of the most popular complementary therapies to receive today, reflexology is founded on the principle that the body is reflected on the feet and hands. The reflexologist connects to a system of pressure points and reflexes in the foot or hand, using thumbs, fingertips and knuckles, to stimulate a response in the body. Generally the feet are worked on as they can be more sensitive than the hands.



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Different textures can be felt by the practitioner and the client is sometimes aware of tenderness, numbness or a sharper 'pain' response. It's important that the practitioner works with the client and responds to feedback. A deep treatment does not need to be painful. I want you to enjoy the therapy. There is a balance between you experiencing no sensation because the touch is too light or holding onto the couch and gritting your teeth because the pressure being applied is too intense.

number of sessions

Sometimes clients attend one session but I encourage a course of treatments to allow a relationship to grow between us and to give time for reflexology to encourage balance and well-being. The ideal is weekly sessions for four to six weeks followed by a monthly appointment. From experience, the client will feel relaxed after the first session but will begin to realise the benefits of the therapy by the fourth treatment.

Expectations

I am sometimes told that a reflexologist has diagnosed a condition. I have never diagnosed anything and my training and ethics discourage me from doing so. Reflexology highlights imbalances in the body. We are unable to say what these imbalances are. We can certainly be guided to areas that require some attention but we are dynamic beings and the processes of the body and mind are always changing in response to our internal and external environment. Working over time, gives a much clearer picture of our health. This is not just our physical state. Health incorporates our emotions, our mind, our spirit and our body; how we feel in ourselves. Do we feel that our energy levels are stable? Are we in a place where we

can respond to demands we place on ourselves and by others and be nurtured by the process without feeling exhausted and irritable?

Our bodies do not exist in isolation. The mind, body and spirit are intimately connected, some would argue they are the same thing. Most of us live within a community of some description. We change from one hour to the next. When a client walks into the therapy room, the consultation has begun. How I read the feet and hands is coloured by our conversation and our interaction. Physical symptoms cannot be interpreted separately from the rest of you.

Often, a new client comes to see me after several different practitioners. This can be helpful as well as limiting. I prefer to offer reflexology firstly as a place to deeply relax and reconnect. We have an amazing ability to heal ourselves when the conditions allow it. At its simplest, reflexology reduces stress in the body and allows the mind to become still. What happens next is different for everyone. For most clients, there is a feeling of relaxation and clarity. The effect of relaxation is individual. One person relaxes and realises how tired they are, another feels like they could take on the world and bounce through the rest of the week!

sessions for fertility, pregnancy, post-birth and for the family

Before conception, reflexology may help to regulate hormones and the menstrual cycle, improve your health and strengthen your constitution, reduce anxiety around conception and, if you are receiving fertility treatment, they can support you (and your partner) at this time.

If you are already pregnant, reflexology and most complementary therapies provide a space to enjoy being pregnant. At the beginning of your pregnancy you may find physical and emotional changes leave you feeling uncomfortable or tired. Reflexology may help to provide balance and support for these changes.



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A reflexology study by Motha and McGrather (1995) into labour experience of 37 women following ten reflexology appointments during pregnancy report the following findings:

- Average length of first stage labour was only five hours compared to a norm of 16 to 24 hours
- Second stage labour lasted 16 minutes, compared to a norm of one to 2 hours
- One woman required an epidural (2.5% compared to average 20%)
- Two women needed an emergency caesarean (5.4% compared to average 13%).

Antenatal appointments provide a space for you and the baby to relax and rebalance. These holistic approaches will allow you to be in the moment, taking the emphasis off labour and what might be. Learning to relax is excellent preparation for natural or assisted labour and parenthood. As pregnancy progresses, you may want relief from muscle imbalances which can lead to sciatica, carpal tunnel syndrome, general aches and pains or restless legs. Some relief may be gained for symphysis pubis syndrome.



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Post-natal appointments may help the body to recover from labour, encourage lactation, ease mastitis, aches and pains and help hormones to rebalance. Having time to relax gives something back to parents who give their new-born unconditional love, time and protection. Babies can be treated too, with parents learning simple reflexology techniques to soothe their baby.

Some clients connect more deeply with reflexology than massage. There can be a deep release of muscular tension and changes in postural awareness. Working through the feet allows me freedom to investigate muscular pain in a safe way and the changes in tension can sometimes seem miraculous – they're not, it's our innate ability to heal!

Reflexology maps are easily found on the internet and there are many books available if you are interested in reading more about this subject. I would recommend the following authors: Lynne Booth and Jan Williamson.

vertical reflex therapy (VRT)

VRT is a reflexology technique developed by Lynne Booth. The feet or hands are worked on whilst they are weight bearing. The reflexes are stimulated at a deeper level. This technique is used in combination with the more traditional approach of being reclined in a chair or on a couch. Just a few minutes at the beginning will prepare the person for the work to come, and a few minutes at the end can focus on imbalances that have presented during the session.