

Sole searching

Reflexology treats ailments from the ground up

By Gloria Smith
Inside Health

CAN THE KEY to our hearts be found on the soles of our feet? According to the basic principles of the ancient healing art known as reflexology, the feet contain numerous conductors, or reflex points, that connect, by longitudinal energy pathways, to all parts of our inner bodies.

"By applying pressure to the correct area of the foot," says Bonnie Law, a Middletown counselor who practices and instructs the technique, "reflexology can increase energy flow to internal organs, glands, muscular and skeletal structures as well as other body parts to cleanse, promote healing and bring the body into harmony."

In the 1970s, Law was introduced to reflexology by a friend – a nurse who was working on her doctorate degree in kinesiology, the science of muscles in motion. At first, Law thought rubbing the foot to heal the body was about as probable as rubbing a lamp to make a genie appear. But she was assured she had nothing to lose (there are no known ill effects) and everything to gain.

The massage brought about something Law describes as "an out-of-body experience." Initially, she found the pressure generally soothing and relaxing, but "at one point I felt like there was sand between my skin and the bones on my feet," she says.

With continued pressure, she felt a grinding sensation, then a sudden surge of energy shot through her body like a jolt of electricity – more exhilarating than painful, she said.

Law became a believer and practitioner. Today, she uses reflexology primarily in stress reduction, to relieve muscular tension and headache.

The pressure the reflexologist applies to the foot

acts in much the same way a plunger does to a plumbing line – it unclogs blockages so that energy can flow more smoothly. According to theory, it can cleanse and promote healing and bring the body back into balance, sometimes bringing immediate relief to certain kinds of distress.

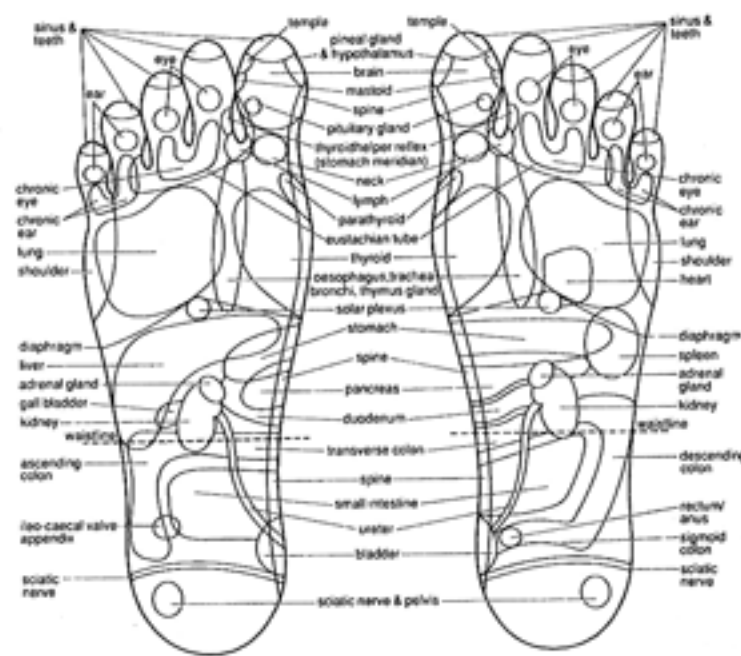
Some form of reflexology has been with us since man has walked the earth – a fact that makes Inge Douglas, author of "The Complete Guide to Reflexology," wonder why it is considered alternative while orthodox Western medicine, an infant by comparison, is called traditional.

Hieroglyphics in the tomb of an Egyptian physician reveal that reflexology was practiced as long ago as 4000 B.C. in Egypt. In China, it is traced back to around 2500 B.C., and is believed to have developed concurrently with acupuncture. Many of the world's indigenous peoples acknowledge that feet have the power to balance the body physically as well as mentally and spiritually. Among Native Americans, the

foot is respected as the place that, quite literally, grounds us to the spirits of the earth and universe. Because the practice developed in different times and in different areas, there is some disagreement among practitioners as to what areas of the foot connect to which areas of the body.

For Sabine Sladek, who practices reflexology at her studio outside of Slate Hill, therein lies the rub. Like many reflexologists today, she believes the correct reflex points on the foot are those that correspond to the meridian lines used in acupuncture. Sladek uses reflexology in conjunction with other forms of healing massage.

Like many other healing techniques, reflexology should be repeated over a number of sessions to achieve maximum results, she says. "It's important to go slowly, especially in the beginning." Once balance is achieved, sessions may become shorter.



The length of each treatment and the duration of time needed to bring the body into balance depends on each individual, Sladek said. The more receptive a person is, the more successful treatment will be.

Reflexology is still considered a "fringe" therapy, and most insurance companies do not cover treatment. A full hour to hour-and-a-half session will cost, on the average, about \$50.

How does the medical community feel about reflexology?

Podiatrist Richard Shanin, DPM, of Goshen believes foot massage may have therapeutic benefits, though he says it was not part of his medical training. Shanin said he is not aware of any anatomical basis for the practice, but acknowledges that many prac-

tices once considered alternative have increasingly been incorporated into the mainstream.

George Giovannone, a physical therapist from Middletown, points out that it is not solely the foot that provides portals to the inner body – the ear, hand and eye also provide clues to our inner health. Although he did not receive training as a reflexologist, he embraces many techniques, including therapeutic massage, in his quest to restore the body to health.

While reflexology may be a ticklish subject for some members of the medical community, no one has suggested it does more harm than good. "It's not my area of expertise," said Sharon Valencia, a Goshen podiatrist, "but I will say this – a foot massage under almost any condition usually feels great." ◊



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