

# Reflexology Hand Out - HealthandWellbeing@Work 2010

I became interested in Reflexology by accident. I trained in massage in 1998 and decided to look for some additional foot massage techniques. After experiencing a few reflex treatments I was hooked, how in the world could this lady twiddling my toes tell me that I had a stomach issue and that my left wrist was showing up?

Whilst training in reflexology I experienced similar amazing stories with my clients and many had quite significant 'healing' crisis' t the treatment, one lady who received only a very gentle treatment took to her bed for a week after, a perfect example of a body taking space and healing itself, unfortunately I didn't get to see her again, and hope that she has been brave and revisited the world of reflexology, from experience now it is rare to have such a strong reaction after regular treatments.

Until recently there was no evidence to support how reflexology works, we know it isn't nerve endings and wondered if it was due to the meridian theory. When asked 'how it works' I simply reply that I don't know. However, a recent study in Japan signifies a break through:

## **MRI research sheds new light on reflexology**

A Japanese study into reflexology has made a significant breakthrough in establishing a scientific link between reflexology areas in the foot and parts of the human brain.

The research, which used functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI) to measure the brain activity of people undergoing reflexology, is the first study of its kind and offers tantalising proof that differences in the brain can be made by stimulating specific areas of the feet.

Although reflexology is believed to be more than 4,000 years old, little is known about how the alternative therapy actually works, as Tracey Smith, Research and Development Manager at the Association of Reflexologists, explains.

"One of the major criticisms levelled at reflexology as a therapy is that there has been no proof of any route of connection between the foot and any other representative organ in the body, which is the underlying idea of reflexology," she said.

The fMRI study, which took place at the University of Tohoku, investigated three reflex areas relating to the eye, shoulder and small intestine. A statistical analysis showed that reflexological stimulation of the foot reflex areas corresponding to the eye, shoulder, and small intestine activated not only the somatosensory areas corresponding to the foot, but also the somatosensory areas corresponding to the eye, shoulder, and small intestine or neighboring body parts.

"Although this particular report is not enough evidence in itself, it does raise interesting questions about our understanding of the human body and shows the potential for alternative therapies to have greater influence on conventional treatment in the future," Tracey adds.

T. Nakamaru, N. Miura, A. Fukushima. and R. Kawashima. Somatotopical relationships between cortical activity and reflex areas in reflexology: A functional magnetic resonance imaging study. *Neuroscience Letters* 448 (2008), 6-9.

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There is also much data and research into reflexology for fertility and some maternity hospitals are championing the treatment for reduced labour times and labour pain. I have had many calls from expectant ladies asking for a treatment to turn a breach baby, as recommended by their midwives.

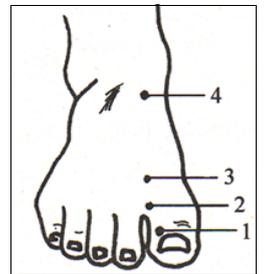
It is easy to give yourself a simple reflexology treatment. We work on the basis that there are energy zones running through the body and reflexes that relate to the organs and structure of the body.

### Techniques

One basic movement we use is called 'Thumb walking' also known as 'Caterpillar Walk'. We use this movement often in the treatment, when we are actually manipulating all the body areas. The movement can be carried out by imagining you are watching a caterpillar crawling and you imagine your thumb to be the caterpillar crawling over the foot or hand. This movement often needs practice, don't despair, you really can use any which way to stimulate a reflex. In some countries they use sticks (quite painfully) to stimulate the reflexes.

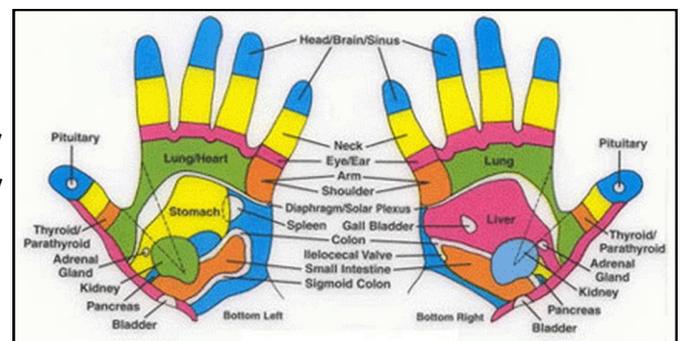
### Reflexology for common Ailments

**Headaches:** Work all toes and neck reflexes including the sinuses. Work the liver meridian (in between big toe) and the liver reflex on the right foot. →



**Backache:** Work all spinal reflexes on hands and feet. Also using the booth method of vertical reflexology, place your foot on a stool, applying pressure to your leg with your arm. Start working the back of the ankle and up into the leg and then work the spinal reflexes (inner edge of the foot) and the hip reflexes (outer edge of the foot). Finally work the muscle reflexes—entire top of the foot.

**Insomnia:** It's good to use a cream or oil for this and start by massaging the whole foot or hand. Pay particular attention to the solar plexus and pituitary reflex (found in the centre of the swirls in the big toe/thumb).



Get in contact if you have any questions. Victoria