

Reflexology 101

Reflexology is a type of massage that involves applying different amounts of pressure to the feet, hands or ears. People who practice this technique are called reflexologists.

How does reflexology work?

There are a few different theories about how reflexology works.

Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM)

Reflexology rests on the ancient Chinese belief in qi (pronounced “chee”), or “vital energy.” According to this belief, qi flows through each person. When a person feels stressed, their body blocks qi. This can cause an imbalance in the body that leads to illness. Reflexology aims to keep qi flowing through the body, keeping it balanced and disease free.

In Chinese medicine, different body parts correspond with different pressure points on the body. Reflexologists use maps of these points in the feet, hands, and ears to determine where they should apply pressure. They believe their touch sends energy flowing through a person’s body until it reaches the area in need of healing.

Other theories

In the 1890s, British scientists found that nerves connect the skin and internal organs. They also found that the body’s entire nervous system tends to adjust

to outside factors, including touch. A reflexologist's touch may help to calm the central nervous system, promoting relaxation and other benefits just like any form of massage.

Others believe that the brain creates pain as a subjective experience. Sometimes, the brain reacts to physical pain. But in other cases, it may create pain in response to emotional or mental distress. Some believe that reflexology can reduce pain through calming touch, which may help to improve someone's mood and reduce stress.

Another belief, zone theory, contends that the body contains 10 vertical zones. Each zone contains different body parts and corresponds to specific fingers and toes. Practitioners of this theory believe touching these fingers and toes allows them to access every body part in a particular zone.

Dr. William Fitzgerald is credited with bringing "reflexology" to the United States in the early 1900s in the form of zone therapy. It has been said he formulated the practice on the ancient TCM practice known as acupressure.

What are the potential benefits of reflexology?

Reflexology is linked to many potential benefits, including:

- reduced stress and anxiety
- reduced pain
- lifted mood
- improved general well-being

In addition, people have reported anecdotally that reflexology helped many conditions, including:

- boost immune system
- fight colds/bacterial infections
- sinus issues
- back problems
- hormonal imbalances
- fertility
- digestion
- ease arthritis pain
- nerve problems/numbness

What does the research say?

There aren't many studies about reflexology. In a 2014, a review concluded that reflexology isn't an effective treatment for medical conditions. However, advocates, recipients and practitioners have found it to offer value as a complementary therapy to help reduce symptoms and improve someone's quality of life, much like massage.

Is reflexology safe?

Generally, reflexology is very safe, even for people living with serious health conditions. It's noninvasive and comfortable to receive.

However, talk to your doctor first if you have any of the following health issues:

- circulatory problems in the feet

- blood clots or inflammation of your leg veins
- gout
- foot ulcers
- thyroid problems
- epilepsy
- low platelets or other blood problems
- pregnancy

You may still be able to try reflexology if you have any of these issues, but you might need to take a few precautions to avoid any adverse effects.

Some have reported mild side effects such as lightheadedness, tenderness of the feet, and emotional sensitivity. These short-term side effects that tend to go away shortly after treatment.

The bottom line

Reflexology may not be a scientifically proven medical treatment for disease, but studies suggest it's a helpful complementary treatment, especially for stress and anxiety.

If you're interested in reflexology, look for a properly trained and certified reflexologist.

Talk to your doctor if you are pregnant or have any **serious** existing conditions before service.

~ *Source: Healthline w/ edits* ~