

Reflexology

Reflexology is based on the principle that certain points on the feet and hands, called reflex points, correspond to various parts of the body and that by applying pressure to these points in a systematic way, a practitioner can help to release tensions and encourage the body's natural healing processes.

Foot treatments have been used in many cultures, including India, Egypt and China, for thousands of years. Reflexology in its current form was developed by Eunice Ingham in the 1930s, based on the discoveries of the American ear, nose and throat specialist, William Fitzgerald in the early 20th century. It was brought to Europe by Doreen Bayly and has become very popular in the UK. It is offered in many specialist centres such as pain clinics and cancer units.

What is reflexology commonly used for?

Some people see a reflexologist to help with a specific symptom; others use the therapy regularly to maintain good health. Many people find reflexology relaxing and use it to help reduce anxiety, stress and physical tension.

Reflexologists work with a wide range of conditions including certain types of pain, particularly back and neck pain, migraine and headaches, chronic fatigue, sinusitis, arthritis, insomnia, digestive problems such as irritable bowel syndrome, and constipation, stress-related disorders and menopausal symptoms.

There is some evidence that reflexology can be effective in treating premenstrual symptoms, and headache. A guideline for the treatment of multiple sclerosis, issued by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence, says that there is some evidence to suggest that reflexology might be of benefit for people with the condition.

What will happen when I see a reflexologist?

A complete treatment will usually last around 45 minutes to one hour. The reflexologist will take a case history, asking questions about your symptoms, your lifestyle, and medical history. They will examine your feet and/or the palms of your hand. For this, you will be asked to lie down, usually on a specially designed reflexology chair. The reflexologist will then apply pressure to points on the feet and/or hands, using special thumb and finger techniques to release tension or unblock 'stuck' energy. This aims to help the body to stimulate its own natural healing ability.

After the first treatment, the reflexologist will have an idea of what your specific needs are, and how they need to work with your feet or hands in the future. They will then see you for a course of treatment, usually 6-8 sessions.

What precautions should I take?

After treatment you may feel tired, light-headed, relaxed or weepy; have tender feet; need to go to the toilet more often or have flu-like symptoms.

People taking medicines for diabetes should talk to their doctors before having reflexology as treatment may interfere with their medication. Reflexology may not be suitable for people with gout, foot ulcers or circulatory problems affecting their feet, or for people who have epilepsy or thyroid or depressive disorders. People with cancer should see a reflexologist who is trained to treat people with cancer as there are

particular places on the feet that should be avoided or treated particularly gently. Some blood specialists advise that people with very low blood platelet counts should not be treated with reflexology.

It is inadvisable to have reflexology during the first three months of pregnancy.