

Where Would You Be Without Your Feet?

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Incorporating Reflexology into Your Life Footprints for Health

You walk on them all day, but did you know your feet do more than carry you from one place to the next? They also have a unique connection to balanced health and well-being. In a form of bodywork known as reflexology, the feet are said to contain reflex areas that mirror and connect to all parts of the body--and pressure on these points can actually influence your state of health.

What is Reflexology

The roots of reflexology draw, in part, from the ancient healing art of foot massage, practiced the world over, from Asian and Egyptian civilizations to tribal communities of the Americas. Early archaeological digs have revealed statues

relaxation technique. Using the thumb, finger, and hand, gentle pressure is applied to reflex areas of the feet in order to decrease stress and bring the body into equilibrium. While some reflexologists also apply treatment to the hands and ears, the foot--with its greater quantity of sensitive nerve endings--is considered the most amenable to this approach.

Although simplistic in application, the effects of the treatment can be profound. Through activation of nerve receptors in the hands and feet, new messages flood into the body system, changing its tempo and tone. In essence, the foot or hand becomes a conduit for sharing information throughout the



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of Buddha in China and Japan, and Vishnu (a Hindu god) in India, depicting markings of specific areas on the feet. But it has only been within the last century that this work has established a foothold, so to speak, in Western practice.

As we know it today, reflexology is viewed primarily as a stress reduction or

body. Function in the connecting area is improved and, at the same time, the body experiences overall relaxation and benefits to the circulation and elimination systems. When the body's systems are at optimal functioning, self-healing is enhanced.

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"The human foot is a masterpiece of engineering and a work of art."

-Leonardo da Vinci

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In this sense, reflexology is not a medical treatment for specific symptoms or diseases, but rather a way to facilitate the body's inherent healing power. Therefore, it stands to reason that paying attention to your feet can also be a great preventive measure and one easily incorporated into a daily routine.

How and why reflexology works the way it does is still up for debate. Some say it involves communication through the nervous system; other theories point to opening blockages of chi, or vital energy, in the body. Regardless, scientific studies have documented its benefit for a variety of ailments, ranging from acute disorders to chronic diseases. The majority of reflexology research has come from China where the technique is commonly used in hospitals and homes for both health maintenance, and as adjunct to medical care. Some of the positive findings include reduction of pain, improvement in circulation, release of tension, and improved effectiveness of medication, as well as benefits for diabetes and headaches.

Fancy Footwork

Kevin Kunz, author of several reflexology books and codirector of the Reflexology Research Project, emphasizes the importance of making reflexology a part of your life. Consistency is key if you expect results, and foot homework is a low-cost, efficient way to extend the benefits of weekly sessions with your reflexologist. The techniques can be practiced even while you're busy doing something else. You can purchase devices such as foot rollers for use under the desk, but even inexpensive homemade devices will do, Kunz says. "You can put a golf ball in a sock, tie it up, and you have a roller. Anything to cause stimulation has a beneficial effect."

Reflexology is also a safe and effective technique for infants and children, soothing their emotions and promoting sleep. Naturally available and noninvasive, this approach can enhance communication between parent and child and aid in developing the child's physical awareness.

Feedback and Stimulation

According to Kunz, lack of stimulation for the feet is a major problem in our society. We box our feet in shoes and forbid them to traipse the natural environment. Some American feet never even see sunlight, much less travel naked on a forest floor. "The feet carry the body, in more ways than one," Kunz says. "Constant feedback from the feet is needed in order for the body to make the proper responses." There is no challenge for the foot in walking on flat surfaces. Feet crave stimulation, and they were built for a variety of surfaces.

The Japanese, as well as Europeans, have addressed this basic need by creating health pathways to stimulate every part of the foot. "This comes from taki fumi," Kunz says, "to step upon bamboo. Here we call them stroll pathways. The idea is that you stroll along, and as you do, you are strengthening the system. It's great exercise and gives you more endurance."

In Asia, pathways frequently feature cobblestones for stimulation, but a sandy beach or rocky hiking trail can provide variation underfoot.

Whatever path you choose, get off the pavement, free your feet, and let them do their thing. "Over thousands of years," Kunz says, "every culture has discovered it in some shape or form. The foot is it."



Scientific studies have documented the benefits of reflexology for a variety of ailments.

Footprints for Health

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Treat your feet, and body, to reflexology.

Hibernating is for the Bears Plan to Stay Fit This Winter

Winter's here, and you've moved your running shoes to the back of the closet until April. Yet that piece of pumpkin pie has your name on it.

With the onset of colder weather, shorter days, and snow-covered streets, we eat more and exercise less, waiting for the spring thaw to get back in shape. Instead of having to make New Year's resolutions to lose holiday weight and join a health club, why not set goals to stay fit this winter?

MOVE FITNESS INDOORS

Winter is the perfect time to start a weight-training program. When it's sunny and warm in summer, you'd rather be outside cycling or rock climbing. When it's snowing, why not lift weights for 30 minutes during lunch? Statistics show that more people

suffer heart attacks in winter from shoveling snow, often because they're out of shape. With regular strength training, you'll be able to shovel that snow and get a head start with outdoor sports when spring comes around.

WALK OUTSIDE ON WEEKENDS

Going for a jog or walk during mid-day when the sun is high is a great time to get outside and catch a few rays. Be sure to dress warmly, wear sunscreen, and drink plenty of water. Dehydration is most common in colder months when you're less aware of fluid loss.

TAKE A DANCE CLASS

Accept that invitation to the New Year's Eve celebration and take a class in ballroom dancing. While you're dancing, you're not hanging around the buffet table or the bar, and your

waistline will thank you for it.

REDISCOVER ICE SKATING

Whether it's on a frozen pond or at a rink, ice skating provides seasonal exercise opportunities, especially good for the legs. And it's great fun, bringing out the kid in all of us.

CONSIDER SNOWSHOEING

Snowshoeing is just a matter of strapping snowshoes onto your boots and walking. Snowshoes make hiking trails and snowy city parks accessible and can be rented from sporting goods stores at a relatively inexpensive price.

"Dancing is the poetry of the foot."

-John Dryden

How many steps do your feet take in a day, a week, a month, a year? Remember to take care of your feet, so they in return can take care of you.

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