



# Reflexology: Healing from the feet up

by Linda Clifford

*“Reflexology is Nature’s push-button secret for vibrant health, more dynamic living, abundant personal energy, and better living without pain. A scientific technique of massage that has a definite effect on the normal functioning of all parts of the body.”*

Dr. William Fitzgerald

## WHAT IS REFLEXOLOGY?

Reflexology is an ancient art and science based on the principle that there are reflex points on the feet and hands which correspond to all the organs and systems of the body. Practiced as far back as ancient Egyptian times, reflexology has played a role in eastern medicine for centuries.

The modern theory of reflexology was first introduced in the early 1900s by Dr. William Fitzgerald, an eminent eye, ear, nose and throat physician

working at St. Francis Hospital in Hartford. Dr. Fitzgerald developed what he termed the “zone” theory. This came from the finding that he could ease symptoms and relieve pain by applying pressure to a corresponding “zone” point. He wrote articles and books on the subject, and is considered the “father” of Zone Therapy, the precursor to modern reflexology. Eunice Ingham, a physical therapist who worked for a colleague of Dr. Fitzgerald’s, continued to research and develop these findings, refining them into the field we know today as reflexology. She is considered the “mother” of modern reflexology.

## HOW DOES REFLEXOLOGY WORK?

As shown in this illustration, the surfaces of the feet are mapped out to indicate the reflex points. With specifically applied pressure and techniques, the trained reflexologist stimulates these points, thus improving circulation in,

and releasing congestion and toxins from, the corresponding organ or body part. While reflexology does not necessarily diagnose, it helps balance body chemistry and stimulate the immune system, enabling the body to normalize and heal itself.

The strong correlation between stress and disease is now widely recognized (e.g.: *National Institutes of Health: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/medlineplus/stress.html>*). Reflexology induces a profound state of relaxation, which puts the body in an optimum state for healing, and may improve: energy levels; sleep quality; blood and lymph circulation; elimination of waste and toxins; and, immune function.

## DOES REFLEXOLOGY HURT?

It definitely should not. If there is “blocked energy” or a problem in a specific part of the body, then the corresponding reflex point may initially be sensitive. With carefully applied pressure, the discomfort should vanish within seconds. Reflexology is intended to feel wonderful!

Reflexology is recognized as a healing art and effective form of bodywork. Studies from around the world have shown it may be beneficial for diverse conditions including: allergies; anxiety; insomnia; plantar fasciitis; PMS/menopause symptoms; and, swelling due to pregnancy, diabetes, or poor circulation<sup>1</sup>. It is practiced in many hospitals as a pre- and/or post-surgical complementary treatment.

## WHAT HAPPENS IN A REFLEXOLOGY SESSION?

- Clients complete a general medical history form indicating past or present illness, injuries, allergies, etc.
- The reflexologist evaluates the feet, noting any visible conditions and/or abnormalities.
- Reflexology is received on a massage table or a zero gravity reclining chair. Clients should wear loose, comfortable clothing. Only socks and shoes are removed.

- If desired, the reflexologist can explain the technique as he/she applies it. Questions and feedback from clients are encouraged. Some clients prefer to simply close their eyes, relax, and receive.

- A reflexology session generally lasts one hour. If a condition is acute, the guidelines below apply.

## HOW OFTEN SHOULD I HAVE REFLEXOLOGY DONE?

Reflexology can be considered health maintenance for the body – a kind of tune-up. For a specific or acute condition, the general rule is shorter, more frequent sessions in the beginning, then continuing less often on a regular basis. No matter how often you choose to receive reflexology (once/twice a week, monthly, etc) you’ll likely find it a highly beneficial way to keep your system in balance, and experience deep, health-promoting relaxation, even long after the session has ended.

There are other types of reflexology being practiced, but it is worth noting that the Ingham Method, named after Eunice Ingham, is considered the original. Whichever type you choose, make sure your practitioner is qualified.

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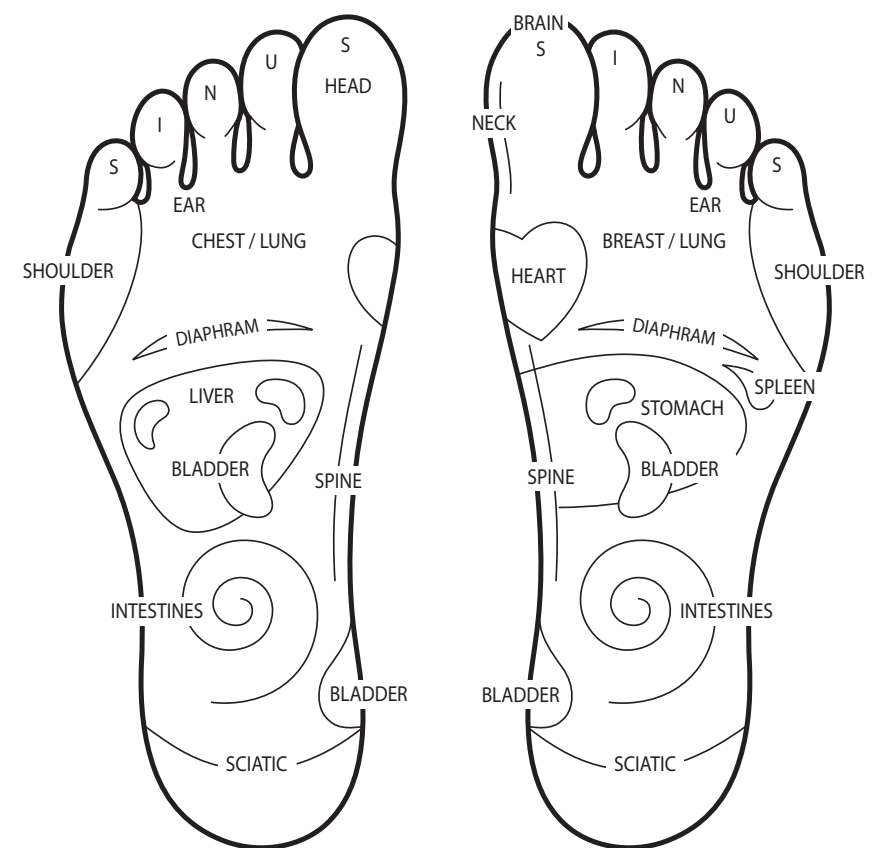
<sup>1</sup> Complementary Therapeutic Clinical Practice Aug. 2007; 13(3):137-45

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## What should I expect from a reflexology session?

Reflexology sessions in general last from 30 minutes to an hour. The client sits in a reclining chair placing the feet conveniently for the reflexologist's work.

Reflexologist will use a chair and at times a table.

Reflexologists use pressure, stretch and movement to work through the foot methodically. Technique is applied to the whole foot.

The reflexologist should work within your comfort zone. Too much pressure can actually be harmful and could lead to injury. But personal preference is something you should communicate with your reflexologist. If you indicate that too much pressure is being used and the practitioner continues we suggest you stop the session. You should always have your wishes respected.

Do not rely on a reflexologist for medical help. The reflexologist is limited to complementing medicine not replacing it.

You should feel relaxation at the end of a session. How long that relaxation lasts is a good indicator of the effectiveness of the session. Make note of this and tell your reflexologist your response to the session at the next session. This can be helpful information.

Finally enjoy the session. Be careful that talking doesn't interfere with the relaxation effect. Discussing world politics is probably something best left to another time.