

Using Reflexology to Help Overcome Pain



Pain affects people in so many ways. It can be a long, lingering nagging pain, a sharp stabbing pain or even the fear of pain itself. Whatever the level of problem, any form of pain can be hard to cope with and have a detrimental impact on everyday life. Fortunately, in reflexology we can see that there are numerous techniques that may be helpful towards gaining a reduction of pain for anyone using and experiencing reflexology. Sue Ricks HMAR tells all...

Incredible numbers of passionate reflexologists have anecdotally witnessed the effectiveness of reflexology techniques; however, in this article I can only express my own experiences and opinions, knowing that everyone is indeed spreading the word – plus, the clients are literally voting with their feet!

I was fortunate enough to take part in clinical trial work at the Prince of Wales Hospital, Cardiff. On many occasions I witnessed the effectiveness of reflexology in action with people who had operations for hip replacements, and although the trial was sadly never formally presented, I have my own personal recollections to draw from.

On one occasion a gentleman had arrived on the bus having walked for 15 minutes to get to the bus stop and then into hospital. He was in great pain, but confident that his hip replacement would be the way forward for him. He had his second reflexology treatment the day before his hip operation and commented that he had had the most comfortable night's sleep that he could remember ever having – not bad for someone who had said he was terrified of having an operation!

On another occasion a gentleman had been to the hydrotherapy pool whilst recovering from having had (unusually) two hip replacements. He experienced horrendous muscle spasms on return to his bed on the ward and the registrar was



summoned to assist him. In the meantime, we were asked if there was anything that we might be able to do with reflexology. My experience on that day taught me how phenomenally effective reflexology might be. On applying a positive and careful hold on his foot, specifically intended to provide release and relief throughout the spinal and skeletal reflexes, he was able to relax sufficiently to be able to breathe. When the hold was released, he was again in agony. When the hold was reapplied, he was able to breathe again.

As soon as the registrar arrived, medication was administered to assist him. Two days later, this gentleman expressed his incredulity that simply holding his feet could have provided him with such relief. The fact that the work undertaken was never officially written up is sad, as it showed the effectiveness of having reflexology for those having hip replacement operations. However, my personal experiences and recollections will stay with me and contribute to the foundation of my belief in the effectiveness of reflexology.

We all know as reflexologists that what we need is research to provide proven results. Having done that work previously in 1993 (where the results were unfortunately lost), I now draw on the wealth of personal experiences and know that the work



currently being undertaken by many will continue to demonstrate the effectiveness of reflexology for those who are experiencing pain. Hopefully, one day soon we will see a whole new insight into what is happening in reflexology that can make such a significant difference to those afflicted by painful conditions. I can only share my experiences here.

Case One

A gentleman aged 65 asked if reflexology might help him to cope with a chronic and acute back condition that meant he could barely move. We discussed the suitability of access for him and he bravely came to his first treatment. He was clearly in considerable pain when he first arrived. It took him a great deal of effort to achieve any level of comfort in order to be able to answer my questions. During the initial consultation, he revealed that having been a keen sportsman, he lived in permanent pain with what he called 'spasms'. He said that he described his level of pain as 9/10 (severe) and it was having a life limiting effect on him.

He listed consultants, doctors and international sports specialists who had been approached in the hope of gaining some relief. During his initial visit we discussed the potential of after-effects of having treatment with reflexology, including the fact that he may feel worse before he feels better. He said that anything was worth the risk; however, I think he was hoping it would be plain sailing! It wasn't - that night, he said that he experienced excruciating pain and had wondered if he'd made a mistake in having reflexology!

Fortunately, he remembered what we had discussed at his visit and called me in the morning for reassurance. I saw him the following day and he reported an infinite improvement, rating his level of pain as having dropped to 5. Two treatments later, he said that the pain had disappeared, although he could sense that the wrong movement might aggravate things. Since then, I only see this gentleman if he begins to experience warning signs of a re-occurrence. Over the last seven years, he has only had one minor re-occurrence that again resolved after a treatment.

Case Two

A lady aged 39 was recommended by a friend after she experienced a whiplash injury following a car accident a week before. She arrived wearing a neck collar and was clearly in considerable pain. She was worried that the treatment itself might hurt, as she felt that she was at her limit of being able to cope with any more pain. I explained that I practice and teach Gentle Touch Reflexology and that I would only be using very light techniques to hopefully assist her. As soon as I started work on her neck reflexes she experienced what she said were 'noises then clicks' in her neck. Initially she wept, and I halted the treatment to check with her: she said the tears were relief as her neck was no longer hurting. She immediately fell asleep and woke up after the treatment saying she would call me and let me know if she needed further treatments. She rang two days later to confirm that she did not need any further treatments.

Case Three

A baby boy aged 7 months was brought to see me. His grandmother is a client of mine and had experienced great relief from pain and discomfort experienced in her knees. She said it had changed her life and hoped that reflexology might help her daughter and grandson.

Her grandson, baby S, had screamed for large parts of each and every day since he had been born. He had been referred to a pediatrician, and the family had great support from their doctor and health visitor. During baby S's first treatment, I noticed an irregularity in the reflex areas around the sacrum and associated muscles. The area felt hot, spongy and extremely vulnerable.

I worked very lightly over the whole area and then rested my forefinger over the area for quite some time. The excess energy accumulation that I detected under my finger gradually began to dissipate. Baby S became wide-eyed and just stared into space!

I completed the rest of the treatment and demonstrated a few simple techniques for his mother to continue at home. I was delighted when his grandmother reported that her grandson was now a totally different baby and had begun to crawl, explore and grin!

What is happening and why?

There are so many opinions as to why reflexology works and why it may have a beneficial effect in assisting people in overcoming the horrible experience of pain.

One of my beliefs is that pain is experienced when too much energy gets locked in one place and there is no flow. The pain may be as a result of the previous physical or mental trauma that has caused energy to get locked at some level.

Part of the benefit of reflexology is encouraging flow. Whenever we use touch to a different area of the body to where the original pain is experienced - i.e. the feet or the hands - and use particularly flowing techniques throughout the

reflexes, we encourage movement of energy (chi).

Having used reflexology in many situations including post trauma, pre-and post-operatively (in an adult mixed ward), with premature babies, in hospice care, personally and within a Children's Hospital; I believe that reflexology can be effective at all levels, including assisting the alleviation of physical pain and also emotional pain too.

Our physical body is affected by emotions, and our emotions are affected by thoughts. Reflexology works on all levels as it might help to create a quietness of mind, to calm our emotions and to relax the body. Reflexology (in my belief) is effective physically, emotionally and energetically, as our thoughts affect our energy, especially if the energetic aspects of reflexology are also addressed.

Energetic Aspects of Reflexology.

The energetic or vibrational aspects of reflexology really seem to come into play if a very light touch is applied to the feet or hands. If we think about the body as the physical centre of our energy system and the glow emanating out from the body as our auric/energetic connections, then in the same way as thinking about the layers of an onion, the centre of the onion is where our physical body is and all the outer layers of the onion are the additional layers of our existence. The centre of the onion would be the level at which our human body exists and the outer layers of the onion represent our emotional and mental (or etheric) connections. When working very lightly and sensitively (if someone is in great pain), we are actually working at the level where the physical pain was potentially initially created at a time of an



emotional or energetic trauma. The physical trauma (pain) may be as a result of an energetic or emotional impact that has tracked through and finally impacted on the physical body. Working very lightly at the emotional or energetic level may well get extraordinary results.

Some of the greatest results that I have been lucky enough to witness have come from some of the lightest and most minimal amounts of touch. As is often the case, less is more!

Fortunately we are all different, and some people need a very light and vibrational approach, whilst others need a more firm, positive approach.

Hanne Marquardt (Germany) uses a quality firm approach when pressing into the reflex points on the feet and my own experience of having a treatment from her was experiencing a great deal of love.

She used a very firm level of pressure onto the reflexes that held tension, relating back to the time when my son was born and I experienced a wonderful release. She also experienced a treatment of Gentle Touch Reflexology and took time to consider it, initially saying it had similarities to the Metamorphic Technique and saying that it "seems to access people's pain very gently".

It seems to be one of the greatest strengths of reflexology that there are such a wide variety of techniques offered, whether they be of firm pressure or gentle pressure, and therefore reflexology as a whole offers the widest range of options for clients.

Some individuals need a quality firm pressure to assist them to make a shift whilst other individuals need a more light, sensitive and vibrational approach to create a space for a shift at the location where it may have originally occurred .

Sometimes pressure might help to overcome pressure (tension) and at other times an infinitely light touch might create infinite options for potential change. Either way, I believe that reflexology is a winner and potentially able to help clients overcome pain that they are physically or mentally experiencing.



Picture © Sue Ricks

Sue Ricks HMAR

***Principal of the Sue Ricks School of
Complementary Therapies and founder of
Gentle Touch Reflexology™***

www.suericks.com

