

Reflexology good for hands, feet

Linda Freeman, August 29, 2015

Whenever I get a massage, I always wish more time could be spent on my feet. It just feels so good to have our feet pampered. Which is also why so many women, me included, love getting a pedicure. Sure, a little polish on the toes looks nice, but it's really the foot rub some of us are after.

Most of us take our feet for granted. We stand, walk, run and hike with nary a thought about our feet unless they hurt. Bunions, blisters, corns. Since I make my living, literally, on my feet as a swing dance instructor, it's especially important that I pay attention to them. Enter Lorraine E. Cucci, a certified reflexologist who works out of her home in Pleasant Valley. Reflexology is most often associated with the feet, but Cucci is quick to point out that it can also include the hands, which is why she operates under the name Hands to Feet Reflexology and Healing Arts.

"Some people either can't or don't like to have their feet touched," Cucci said. "Maybe they have a real medical issue, such as a burn, fungus or broken bone, or maybe they simply feel they are too ticklish." For these people, hand reflexology allows the exact same benefits as foot reflexology.

But the practice of reflexology is more than just a foot or hand massage, and its benefits are many. Whereas a massage focuses traditionally on relaxing tight muscles, reflexologists believe there are reflex points on the hands and feet located on the tissues of the skin that link to different organs or parts of the body. When a reflexologist works on the reflex point using thumb, finger and hand techniques, it is thought that it also affects the corresponding part of the body. Say you have liver issues, the reflexologist can address them by working on the liver reflex point on the foot. This is especially helpful when direct application to an organ or part of the body is inaccessible or undesirable.

A study published in the November 2012 issue of Oncology Nursing Forum found that reflexology helped ease some of the side effects from chemotherapy and hormonal therapy treatments in women with metastatic breast cancer. Like in many alternative circles, reflexology also stresses that ill-health is associated with blocked energy, and gentle manipulation and pressure applied on the reflex points opens the energy channels and promotes healing. It may also send signals to the nervous system and release endorphins that reduce stress and pain.

In fact, one of the major benefits of reflexology is the profound relaxation it facilitates. While practices resembling reflexology have been documented in early China and Egypt, it was actually introduced to the United States by two medical doctors in 1913 for its anesthetic effect on the rest of the body. At the time there was no safe and effective method of anesthesia for surgery, and the medical community embraced this new "Zone Therapy." This notion was modified by Eunice D. Ingham, a nurse and physiotherapist in the 1930s. She claimed that the hands and feet were especially sensitive and it was she who mapped the entire body into reflex points on the hands and feet.

So it's no surprise that Cucci brings to her reflexology practice more than 30 years of experience in the medical profession as a registered nurse, blending her nursing knowledge with her intuitive healing gifts.

"Stress is one of the central causes of many illnesses," she said. "When we are bombarded with everyday stressors, such as being overworked, worried about finances, juggling our family and work requirements, and just managing our day-to-day lives, our bodies react with increased levels of cortisol. These continuous increased levels of cortisol keep us in a fight or flight state. Our bodies have a difficult time returning to a balanced or normal state, also known as homeostasis. This sets the stage for illnesses, which can become chronic."

Reflexology promotes relaxation throughout the entire body and brings it back to a state of homeostasis. It is said to also stimulate the elimination process to cleanse the body of toxins, and increase circulation and delivery of oxygen to all cells of the body. This returning to a more balanced and relaxed state gives the body the tools to begin to heal itself, calming the nervous, hormonal and lymphatic systems, and leading to the restoration of physical, emotional and mental well-being.

The experience

Cucci has a full-time job in the medical field and practices her alternative healing arts out of her home in Pleasant Valley on evenings and weekends. She says she finds it healing and centering for herself as well as for her clients. Her dedicated reflexology room is bright and cheery and taken up mostly with the massage table in the middle of the room.

She begins the session by examining my feet and asking if I have any issues or concerns about them and in general. She lays her hands on my feet and closes her eyes. Then she starts to massage my calves. She says she starts at the top and works her way down the Achilles tendon before she starts to work on my feet. It feels great. She applies such great-smelling oils that it's part aromatherapy, part massage as her hands glide over my feet. It's not too long before I fade away completely. The session is one hour and afterward I feel so groggy, I'm not sure I can drive home. Once I get there, I fall into a deep, restful sleep. The next day working in the yard I trip and twist my ankle. I apply RICE (rest, ice, compression and elevation — and my go-to healing application of Topercin cream). Even I am surprised when my ankle feels completely fine in the morning. I attribute my quick healing to my response to the trauma, but also to the fact that I had just received the reflexology treatment. I believe the combination sped the healing.

It is a few weeks before I am able to return, and when Cucci asks if I noticed anything different I tell her the story above, but also that I realize that the soles of my feet feel more sensitive and tender when I walk barefoot. It's almost like after years of no attention, they are now reminding me that they are there. I zone out completely just a little way into the session, but when I leave this time, instead of feeling groggy, I simply feel relaxed. By the third session, I actually feel energized after the session, as if my body needed to go through certain stages in order to get to the most balanced state.

For our final session she introduces me to hand reflexology. She explains that all of the same points that are mapped on the feet also exist in the hands. Just as she started with the calves before working on the feet, here she starts with the forearms before working on the hands. While it seemed obvious once she points it out, I never before really thought about how the back of my hand is like the top of my foot and the palm of my hand is like the sole of my foot. She says she could do a whole hour on just my hands as she had been doing for my feet, but after a half hour I ask her to switch to my feet. I need to nap.

The bottom line

There is nothing more important to a dancer than her feet. Except maybe her overall emotional, physical and mental health. These reflexology sessions addressed all three, offering me an hour of nothing but genuine R&R. While I love getting massages, I often find myself unable to simply drift away from the experience. But with reflexology, I found myself drifting away quite easily. There is something profoundly comforting, even biblical, about having your feet rubbed with oil.

Anyone who read my August column on having a sleep study knows that I seem to have trouble getting a good night's sleep. I found the reflexology treatments to be profoundly relaxing, enabling me to move into a deeper relaxed state than I was able to find in my own bed at home.

These sessions were something I looked forward to and which allowed me perfect relaxation.

In addition to reflexology, Cucci offers Reiki, Medical Intuitive Healing and an aromatherapy treatment called the "Raindrop Technique," which I will be bringing to you in a future Holistic Guinea Pig column. As always, stay tuned.

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Raindrop Technique known for use in treating Lyme disease

When I wrote about my reflexology experience with Lorraine Cucci back in September, I promised to let you in on one of the other therapies she practices: Raindrop Technique. Raindrop Technique is a form of aromatherapy in which designated Young Living Essential Oils are applied to the spine, feet and shoulders in a prescribed format and manner. Its aim is to achieve balance and harmony physically, mentally and emotionally. Raindrop Technique is especially noted for its use in relieving the discomforts associated with Lyme disease.

Why does Raindrop Technique require only Young Living Essential Oils? An obvious reason is that the procedure was developed by Gary Young, the founder of Young Living Essential Oils. But another is that Young Living Essential Oils carry a guarantee of purity and quality. In fact, when I mentioned to a friend that I was about to get a Raindrop treatment, she cautioned that I make sure the practitioner was using only Young Living Essential Oils where every batch is quarantined, inspected and tested for purity and quality by independent labs.

According to the Young Living website, there is no official regulation of essential oil quality in the U.S. Pure essential oils known to be safe for human use may be used on the skin, in the air or internally. However, impure or adulterated oils, whose contents or quality are unknown, can cause mild or extremely serious problems, and may even be carcinogenic with repeated use. Buyer beware.

I had no idea. I shudder to think about the period when I was brushing my teeth with an oil of oregano I would combine with baking soda. At the time, I went to the health food store and just bought the least expensive oil of oregano without any thought to the safety of ingesting it.

Essential oils, also known as precious oils or sacred oils, have been used since antiquity for physical well-being, beauty, courage, wealth and power, and for sacred purposes in temples, religious rituals, births and deaths. Typically, essential oils are light to the touch (not heavy or

greasy like cooking oil) and evaporate readily, releasing their aromas into the air. Their structure allows them to pass through our skin, and through the cell membranes of every cell in our bodies. Lorraine Cucci, a registered nurse, has been delving deeper into alternative health practices since my reflexology treatments last year. She recently completed a certificate in Integrative Health and Lifestyle Program at the University of Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine.

She says the oils stimulate the organs and muscles at a cellular level, and the eight different oils used in the technique work together to boost the immune system and improve structural electrical imbalances. She says they are particularly powerful for emotional relief and depression.

“Just a few drops of oil can calm us down, help us to focus, relieve the occasional tensions of daily life,” states the website. “They can help relax our muscles, support our digestion and aid a good night’s sleep. They can inspire us to feel strong in the face of challenges, whether mental, emotional or physical. They can help support our immune systems, loosen our joints and enhance our ability to enjoy well-being on all fronts. They can help to purify our bodies of chemical toxins and freshen the air we breathe. They connect us with nature.”

So, in a way, stopping to “smell the roses” has a similar function. Is it the stopping or inhaling, or both that can alter a mood?

The handouts Cucci gives me tout the benefits of Raindrop Technique, including:

- Reducing pain due to the analgesic ingredients of the essential oils.
- Relieving stress, as the oils affect the nervous system and limbic system (parts of the brain that affect mood, behavior and emotions).
- Relaxing sore, spastic or stressed muscles.
- Reducing inflammation, as several of the essential oils used are known as powerful anti-inflammatory agents.
- Improving circulation due to the oxygenating properties of the oils.
- Detoxing the body due to the high phenol levels of the oils that cleanse cellular receptor sites and enhance the lymphatic system.
- Improving immune function with thyme and oregano.

In particular, it is noted as a non-evasive tool for Lyme disease because it:

- Kills viral and bacterial pathogens along the spinal column.
- Corrects spinal misalignment.
- Reduces inflammation and back pain.
- Relieves body and joint discomfort.
- Relaxes stressed muscles.
- Supports the immune system.
- Balances energy levels.
- Improves concentration and focus.

The application method involves a technique called Vita Flex, as well as gentle massage. According to Young, “Vita Flex technique means vitality through the reflexes. The oils are applied on the contact points of the body. Energy is released through the electrical impulses by the contact between the fingertips and the reflex points. This stimulates an electrical charge that follows the pathways of the nervous system to where there is a break in the electrical circuit, which will be directly related to an energy block caused by toxins, damaged tissues or loss of oxygen. This reflex system of controls encompasses the entire body and was believed to have originated in Tibet long before acupuncture was discovered.”

The experience

Our first session is at Cucci’s home office in Pleasant Valley, where we did our reflexology treatments. I am in good health and not suffering from any of the things the treatment is purported

to benefit, but I am glad to be there, as who couldn't use a rest and rubdown with great smelling oils?

Since the oils are applied to my spine, I need to only remove my top and socks before getting under the sheet on her massage table. She starts with the outer edges of my feet, which she calls the foot's spinal column before moving to the neck, shoulders, and finally my spine. The oils are dripped onto my back and massaged in using various techniques she identifies as "feathering," "sawing," "stretch & shake," "quiver" and "rubs." All of these manipulations are ways to bring the oils further into the body. Cucci calls it, "peeling the layers."

"We want to awaken the internal healing powers of the body," she explains.

The entire procedure, which can last anywhere from 45 minutes to an hour, is done in silence or with soft background music, and ends with a warm compress.

Afterward, I feel relaxed and rejuvenated, in love with the smell and feel of the oils that have penetrated my skin and my senses.

The thing about being a holistic guinea pig is that sometimes I actually show up for a session suffering from things that the technique is supposed to benefit. My second session two weeks later is at One Epic Place, her office in New Paltz, and I arrive crippled with back pain. It came out of nowhere that morning. Maybe I slept funny. Who knows? All I know is that I can barely drive myself to the session. As much pain as I am in, I am hoping that the promised benefits are true. Cucci has to help me to get on the table. The heated table feels good under my body, as do all the oils and manipulations. Cucci takes special care to massage the area of my back in spasm, and the smells are soothing. Lying there, I am peaceful, resting, not feeling pain at all for the entire hour. Until I have to move. Getting up is still difficult and Cucci has to put my shoes and socks on as if I were a child. But I manage to go right from the treatment to a two-hour cooking class I am covering for another article, and I am able to sit and get up unaided, which I couldn't do before.

The bottom line

I am reminded of the word of caution printed on the bottom of the handouts Cucci had given me: Raindrop Technique is not a cure-all or magic bullet. Everything we say, do, hear, see, eat and think affects our health.

I enjoyed my first session because I was already in a great state of health, and it enhanced my well-being. I was in severe pain prior to my second session and it enhanced my state of well-being proportionately.

Although learning the Raindrop Technique is as easy as going online and ordering the instructional DVD and starter kit, in New York you must be "licensed to touch," so it's a popular additional service for massage therapists or reflexologists like Cucci to incorporate into their practice.