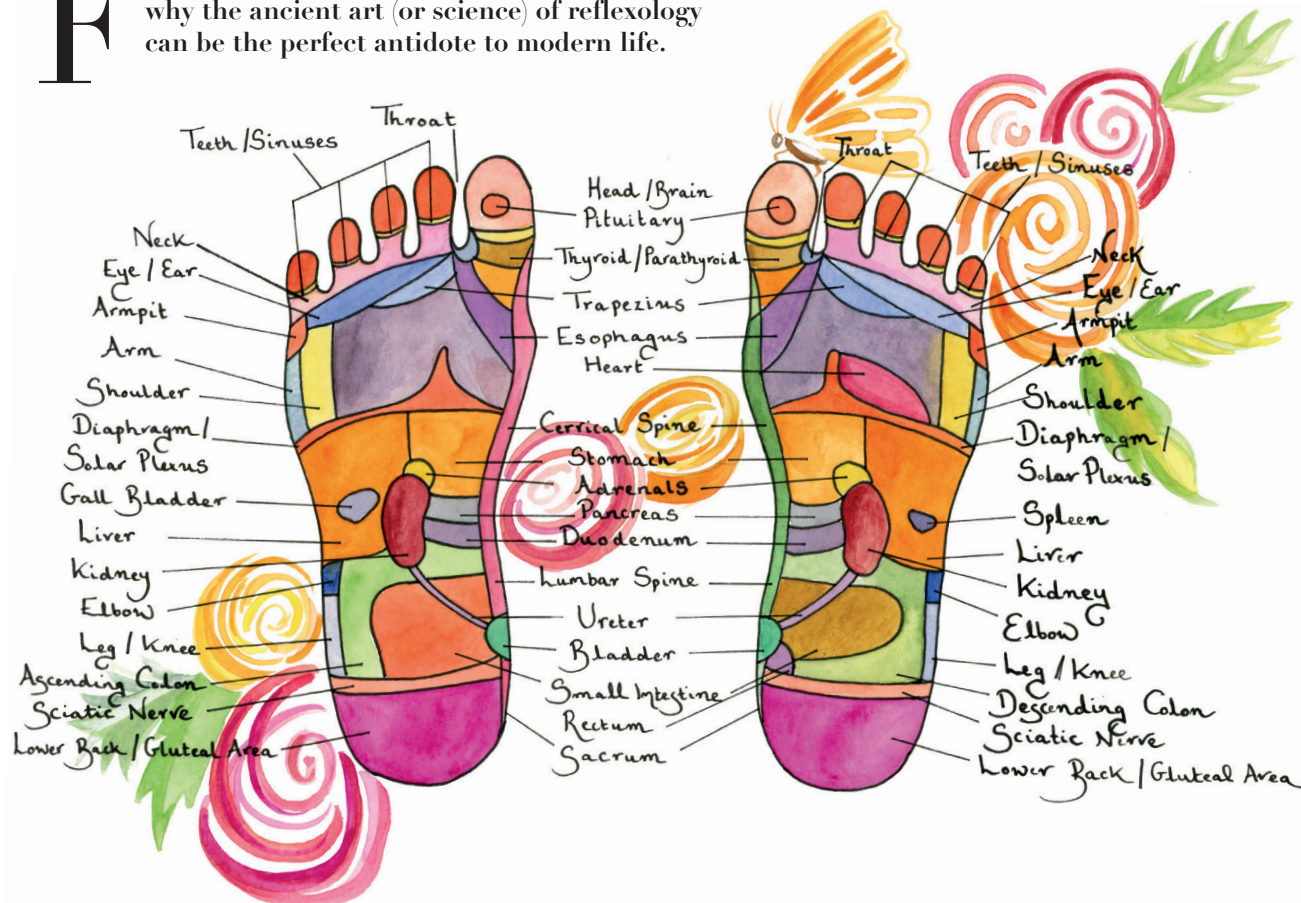


# HOW CAN REFLEXOLOGY SUPPORT YOUR WELLNESS?

BY RHIANE KIRKBY

Freelance journalist Rhiane Kirkby investigates why the ancient art (or science) of reflexology can be the perfect antidote to modern life.



“It’s like having a warm bath or a big hug from a friend - a real chance to reflect on your wellbeing.” Harriet started reflexology when, “after shouldering the pressure of looking after both my parents and children, coupled with the madness of Christmas I decided it was time to do something for myself.” Although it wasn’t entirely what she expected, she’s completely hooked. “I thought it was going to be a little treat, a bit of ‘me time’ like going for a massage. I thought I’d go once. Never in my wildest dreams did I imagine I’d still be going months later - and not only that sending my husband and child there too!”

“I rarely do anything for myself,” says Thora, mum of two, “but when a friend suggested I try reflexology I gave myself permission to do it. I’d been suffering from chronic sinusitis for months and hoped this could help. What I didn’t anticipate was the impact it would have on my whole body and my mind.”

“The first time I went I was buzzing,” explains Harriet, “literally fizzing from the amount of stress inside me. My therapist ‘got me’ straight away. By just holding and ‘massaging’ my feet she described exactly what I was feeling and where I was feeling it and in less than an hour she’d completely calmed me

down - inside and out. I know lots of people aren’t sure about ‘alternative therapies’ but I’m fascinated by the science behind it.”

So what exactly is reflexology and how does it work? “The basic premise,” explains Susanne Coupland, a clinical Level 5 reflexologist based in Marlow (Buckinghamshire), “is that there are reflexes and acupoints on the hands and feet that correspond to other areas of the body. By stimulating these reflexes and acupoints using firm finger, thumb and hand pressure, a reflexologist can help the body and mind balance itself. It’s both a science and an art, a science because it’s based on physiological study and an art because much depends on how skilfully the therapists apply their knowledge. For some it can be little more than a stress-relieving experience, for others it can have a life changing impact.”

Something Susanne knows all too well. “I suffered from severe migraines from the age of fourteen. Once a month I’d lie down in a darkened room for two or three days. I tried everything - medication, acupuncture, massage - nothing worked. Then someone suggested reflexology. I was sceptical, but the therapist picked up a historic knee injury, my back, neck and spine issues and the migraines. Twelve weeks later they were gone and I’ve not had one since. And that was 10 years ago!”

“I love my job, being able to help people gives me so much pleasure. I’m not mentally tired when I come home and that’s what drives me. Seeing the difference in people - not just in health, but in life.” For Susanne, “the beautiful thing about reflexology” is that it can help anyone from babies to those in palliative care. And it may seem a contradiction in terms, but this ancient practice is well placed to help those suffering from the effects of modern day living.

“There’s so much pressure these days - especially amongst mums,” says Susanne. “We’re supposed to have a great career, be around for our children, run stylish homes and - as we’re generally older when we have children - look after ageing parents too. Relaxation is seen as a luxury - a holiday, or spa day - but it’s actually a necessity - enabling our bodies to unwind, restore and reset. It’s no surprise our stress and anxiety levels are high,



Rhiane Kirkby by Carin Thakrar

we find it hard to relax and to sleep and most of us don’t nurture our bodies or minds.”

Thora totally gets this. “Before my first session I was tired, stressed, run down and ‘jittery’. My head was spinning with all the things I had to do. I was looking after two young children, trying to establish my own business, working hard to build friendships in a new area, buying and selling a house - the list goes on. I knew I desperately needed ‘me time.’ I just didn’t know where to find it. I may have gone for reflexology to sort out my sinuses but after just one session I felt calmer, lighter and more in control. My therapist took a holistic approach and made me see the bigger picture - that I needed to look after myself to be able to look after my children. And this time, I listened. Although very unsure at first, I cut down on caffeine, stopped craving chocolate and started to savour the (small amount) of alcohol I drank. I slept better, felt calmer and became so much more in tune with my body. Reflexology balanced out my body and my mind. I’m a firm believer in its restoring power.”

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