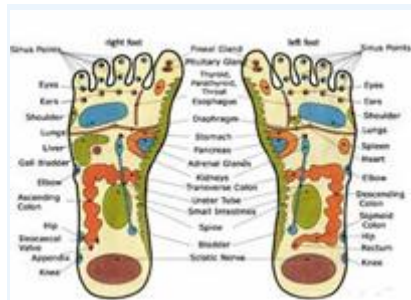


IT'S ALL IN THE PRESSURE POINTS

By Sarah El Sirgany

First Published: August 12, 2006



This chart shows the different reflex points in the feet

Nada Rashed explains the essentials of reflexology

CAIRO: Many people laugh at the idea that touching certain points in their feet or hands can grant a feeling of relief from the pain usually associated with [headaches](#) or digestive and back problems.

Like most [alternative medicine](#), reflexology still struggles for public and official acceptance. Even though countries across the globe now acknowledge reflexology, homeopathy and acupuncture as established medical practices, studied in top-notch universities. The Egyptian public remains skeptical.

Contrary to common belief, reflexology is not imported Chinese hocus pocus but an established science that actually originated in Egypt thousands of years ago. Drawings on ancient monuments show the ancient Egyptians practicing it. "At this time it was the treatment of kings and queens. It was very luxurious and not everyone did it. It was used to stimulate the body and induce energy," says Nada Rashed, a local reflexologist.

In the early 20th century, Dr. William Fitzgerald rediscovered the practice and introduced it to the world as zone [therapy](#). After his death, his assistant, Eunice Ingham, continued his research and developed the science of reflexology. An accumulation of developments and scientific contributions led to the current practice of reflexology, explains Rashed.

Describing it as one of the most important types of alternative medicines, Rashed notes that reflexology falls under the umbrella of practices that address the body's [vital energy](#), a category it shares with homeopathy.

"Vital energy is inside all of us but it is not tangible, you can't measure it," explains Rashed, noting that there have been attempts to measure it scientifically. "We are all born with vital energy. At the beginning it is balanced, but due to certain circumstances like pollution, smoking, excessive alcohol, stress, bad [nutrition](#), environmental changes

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A holistic healer, Nada Rashed says, should be aware of the basics and consequently, she often gives [nutritional](#) advice and even talks to her patients about their personal problems

and weather variance, it starts an imbalance. Once an imbalance occurs in the body's vital energy, the definite result is a 'dis-ease.'"

Rashed says practitioners of alternative medicine prefer to call diseases 'dis-ease,' clarifying that the sufferer's discomfort is associated with a vital energy imbalance. "This is why we tell people, whenever you feel a symptom, don't ignore it. Pay attention to it. This is the body's way of telling you that something is wrong ... of giving you a signal that it is not really functioning at best."

By applying pressure to certain reflex points on the feet, hands and ears, reflexologists try to restore this energy, leading the body to gradually rid itself of the feelings of pain and discomfort and eventually attaining healing from the disease.

The reflex points, distributed throughout the feet and hands, are connected to nerve endings reaching the brain and each represents or is connected to certain body organs and systems. "When you stimulate [a reflex point], it gives a signal to the nervous system, so it acts on the pain receptors in the brain," Rashed explains.

The process has no side effects, but with pregnant women extra attention is required to avoid over stimulation of the uterus and pelvic area, she says.

The foot contains the largest number of reflex points, she adds, and it also includes six of the body's meridians, which are energy pathways running throughout the whole body. The Chinese concentrate on it extensively in acupuncture and acupressure, she says. Thus, foot reflexology is Rashed's favorite of all subcategories; she recently acquired a diploma in foot reflexology directed toward the spine, which she says is the sources of all problems.

The simulation of the reflex points and the meridians is accomplished by exerting pressure or utilizing a gentle circular movement. "It depends on the organ," says Rashed, "Some organs are very tender and have very tender reflexes, so you don't really work by pressing."

Unlike foot massage, which is often confused with reflexology, patients usually experience pain during the session. "In a massage you relax and don't feel tired [it also targets the muscles, unlike reflexology]. In a reflexology session, people frequently feel pain, because I am pressing something they are complaining about," she notes.

Once the patient experiences pain, Rashed gradually reduces the pressure and as the pain dissolves, she makes it firmer. The pain, she explains, means that the body is opening up. "It's taking what it needs from this pressure. This is a form of energy I'm giving to the body and its opening and it is letting energy in. Balance starts occurring."

In the case of elderly people, babies and infants, and people generally sensitive to touch, Rashed is more careful. Because the elderly often have a lower threshold of pain, she reduces the sessions from the standard 45 to 60 minutes to 30 minutes. The same goes for infants but for different reasons; Rashed explains that their vital energy balance is only slightly disturbed at this age.

In the end, no one goes home feeling a bit of discomfort. She uses essential oils and creams to make the pain more bearable. "It's not a torturing session," she adds.

For example, if a patient with a sleep disorder leaves in pain or discomfort, he/she won't be able to sleep after the session. "One of the major things that reflexology really helps with is relaxation and the ability to sleep deeper," states Rashed, "Even if you don't have a sleep problem, it enhances deeper sleep."

Sleep isn't the only area in which reflexology achieves remarkable results; Rashed has personally experienced success in treating headaches, back pain, colon problems and constipation. Reflexology is also effective in hormonal imbalances, infertility, arthritis and stress-related problems.

Rashed notes that she can't fix pathological damage. "I can't recreate. Even medicine can't recreate. In cases [like kidney failure] they go for surgery or transplantation. I can't restore something ruptured or damaged."

She does try to treat the person as a whole. She doesn't just treat a person for headache, but rather acknowledges individual differences, asking questions about their history in an attempt to discover the causes of the problem. Psychological reasons aren't behind every problem, she notes, but she tries to provide "holistic healing."