

## STAND OUT IN THE CROWD WITH REFLEXOLOGY

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Few massage schools in North America teach reflexology in-depth, if at all. Therefore, it's not surprising that most students graduate either knowing nothing about reflexology or with an inaccurate impression that it is simply the application of pressure, during a massage, on sensitive points in the feet.

An analogy is perhaps the best way in which to describe the relationship of reflexology and massage. If we equate bodywork to general medicine, reflexology, massage and Reiki (as examples) are all specialties of bodywork. Oncology and cardiovascular practices are specialties of medicine. Reflexology and massage are *disciplines* (branches of knowledge) of the broader discipline of bodywork. Both are subsets, or modalities, of bodywork. Just as oncology is not a subset of gastrointestinal medicine, reflexology is not a modality of massage.

### What makes reflexology different?

People seek out reflexology for different and the same reasons they seek out massage. Both improve circulation of the blood and lymph and enhance the recipient's quality of life.

Western massage techniques are designed to relax tension within the soft tissue, with the goal of *restoring the health of the anatomy*. The intent may be to diminish pain, improve posture and/or structural function and/or produce physical, emotional and mental relaxation.

Although the benefits of reflexology include relaxation of mind and musculature, the primary intent is to *improve the health of the body's physiology*, the functioning of the body's internal "operating systems". Reflexology typically focuses on reflexes corresponding to stressed organs and glands, not the connective tissue elements of the body part being worked.

### Why seek out reflexology?

In my nearly 30 years of practice, I have found that people choose reflexology (foot, hand and/or ear) when they are experiencing:

- High levels of stress, resulting in sleep disorders, anxiety, depression, etc.
- Pain in the feet and/or hands from overuse, arthritis, plantar fasciitis, carpal tunnel syndrome, excessive text messaging, injuries, gout, etc.

- Less than optimal functioning of a body system, manifesting as respiratory allergies, digestive problems, headaches, diabetes, reproductive issues, dementia, weight gain, ADHD, cancer, etc.

## **Training**

Some massage therapists choose to stand out in the crowd by developing a specialty in reflexology. They either immerse themselves in a comprehensive certification program (the national standard is 300 hours) or take weekend workshops in western-style reflexology or Thai foot reflexology.

Certified reflexologists create reflexology-based practices that safely help people of all ages (in-utero to end-of-life) to restore homeostasis, optimize physiological functions and address system imbalances and weaknesses.

Massage therapists with two or three-day trainings under their belt support clients by offering deeply relaxing stress reduction sessions, or preface their massage treatments with reflexology to dramatically increase the results of their massage.

## **Employment**

There are many models in which to operate a reflexology practice, either as an employee or independent business owner.

When I first began practicing in Toronto in 1983, I shared an office with a massage therapist and skin esthetician. We recommended each other's services as a way to enhance the satisfaction of our clientele, boost our individual businesses and develop a reputation in the community as a "one-stop" operation.

After moving to Florida, I worked with a chiropractor, providing manual therapy to his patients prior to their spinal adjustments. Although the doctor had had a massage therapist working with him previously, he reported that his patients benefited much more from the combination of reflexology and massage.

Environments that might appeal to you:

- mobile home or workplace
- doctor's office (ex. internal medicine, oncology, podiatry)
- private practice on your own or within a group healthcare clinic
- spa (Reflexology is a very popular spa therapy.)
- pain management clinic
- detoxification and/or addiction treatment center

- hospice
- seniors' residence
- athletes (ex. dancers, runners, gymnasts)
- war vets experiencing challenges from amputation, PTSD and injuries

### **Continuing education**

Qualified reflexologists can sit for a national board-certification credential (just like massage), which is maintained with continuing education classes offered through live workshops, online courses and/or at national and state/provincial conferences.

The scope and focus of paths to explore is vast, including maternity and infant reflexology, pain management, essential oils, hot & cold stones, eldercare, Chinese meridian therapy, specific conditions such as fibromyalgia, diabetes, menstrual pain and irregularities, hypertension, cancer, foot pain and much more.

Check out your level of interest in reflexology by registering to take a weekend workshop. Please visit our Member Directory for a list of reflexology educators in Florida.

*Karen Ball, NBCR, LMT, was certified as a reflexology practitioner and instructor in the 1980's, and has maintained an active teaching and clinical practice in the United States and Canada ever since. Through the Academy of Ancient Reflexology, she offers all levels of instruction (from three-hour classes for the lay public to a full 315-hour professional certification) in conventional and Thai reflexology, as well as related subjects. Her professional courses are approved for reflexology and massage continuing education credits by ARCB, RAC, NCBTMB and the state of Florida. Karen writes regularly for national and international publications, including her own blog and e-newsletter, and as one of Massage Magazine's expert bloggers.*

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