

Reflexology: Integrating the Four Theories

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Integrative Reflexology® is based on the premises that when you understand these four principles the intention that you bring to the reflexology session will open new doors for a therapeutic response. I want you to appreciate the fundamental connection that each theory has to the other. The study and practice of health in our era is greatly enhanced by the fact that Eastern, Western, ancient and modern findings and techniques easily dovetail into a hologram of practical application.

Structure

Skeletal alignment of the bones in the feet and upward through the body.

Meridians

Studies show these are channels through which energy, chi energy, subtle body life force energy flow.

Zones

Grid, locator system to reflex points of the body.

Proprioceptors

Nerve endings. Reflex points send information to the brain, which then returns to the organ or area of the body indicated.

STRUCTURE

The development of the Structural Alignment Theory was inspired by the work of Dr. Ida Rolf, who called the feet the “Great Tattle Tellers.” To achieve correct body alignment, one must begin with the feet. When you look at someone’s feet, you can gain insight into the well-being of their body. Structural theory gives clear indications about the flow of energy to various organs and glands.

There are three ARCHES which make up the structural alignment of the foot. Each ARCH correlates to a specific system within the body. The inner or MEDIAL ARCH correlates to the SPINE and is related to the structure of the BODY. Flattened or pronate feet, (where the arch is

rolled inward) compress the spine diminishing the sense of strength. The LATERAL ARCH is related to the function of the COLON and is compressed by standing on the outer side of the feet. This in turn puts pressure on the ascending or descending colon and this stance usually represents holding back, or holding onto something. Over time, this posture can lead to digestive problems, including irregularity or constipation. The COLON is often considered a place where EMOTIONS are stored and the MIND is where the emotions originate and churn. The TRANSVERSE ARCH, relates to the DIAPHRAGM, and the ability to breathe. From the time we first become a SPIRIT in a body on this planet, we breathe... it is the first and last thing we do on earth. (In the meridian flow, the lung meridian is the first meridian.) Shoes that compress the transverse arch can limit the ability to fully breathe and feel one's spirit. It is not uncommon to see a person kick off a pair of too-tight shoes and then BREATHE a sigh of relief.

The alignment of the foot itself is the triangle formed by the center of the heel, the ball of the little toe, and the ball of the big toe. Lengthen out the toes, lift the arch, soften the knees and stand balanced with both feet parallel and about hip-width apart. This stance will create an alignment akin to the Tai Chi stance. In proper alignment, bone is over bone, and there is less stress on the muscles, organs and nerve flow. When you work with your clients in achieving a balanced stance, you are helping them to integrate their feet into the body's composite. This is the essence of foot reflexology.

The trinity of Body, Mind/ Emotions and Spirit is brought into evidence. An example of an imbalanced stance would be: standing on the right leg with the right hip thrown out, the right knee locked, and the arms crossed. This posture (what I call the "teenage stance") throws the pelvis and knee out of alignment. The weight is on the outside of the foot, which compresses the liver or the right kidney. When you massage places on the bottoms of the feet that correlate with these points, they will be tight due to this increased weight and pressure. The nerve flow will also be impaired. The use of reflexology maneuvers will increase the nervous stimuli, restoring energy flow to the impaired region. The reflexologist can learn a great deal about the client by observing their stance and noticing how it affects the structure, the nerve flow, the muscles and the organs. Your goal will be to work towards easing and freeing the impairment.

MERIDIANS

To use an Oriental approach to reflexology, you must gain some understanding of the historical and theoretical basis for Chinese medicine. This ancient system of healthcare dates back at least 5000 years. Unlike our Western medicine, the Chinese did not cut the body open, (the "see it to believe it" approach). Theirs was a system developed by observations. A few of

the observations they made, dealt with temperament, coloring, food preferences or dislikes, sounds, nail beds, and the tongue. Oriental medicine is based on the belief that balance is the key to good health, that one should strive for balance in the seasons, elements, and meridians. The famous yin/yang circle is a symbol of balance. Within the light (yang) there is darkness (yin), and within the darkness (yin) there is light (yang). Balance is not a static experience, but a state of continual change and movement. As we move from season to season, we are readjusting our foods, activities, and seasons or transition of seasons; loving summer and hating winter or vice versa; craving sweet food, or salty food; being joyous, or angry. It is important and helpful to develop an awareness of how seasons, food and attitude are part of your overall health.

In the Western approach to Oriental medicine, we focus on 14 meridians, there are however, many more than that. What is a meridian? It is an invisible channel through which Chi, (life force energy) flows through in a specific pattern. This map of energetic flow, has peak times in each of the meridians and these times correlate with the natural rhythms of the human body over a twenty-four hour period. Fatigue at certain periods of the day can be an indication of an imbalance in a meridian. 12 of the meridians either begin or end on the hands and feet. The other two meridians, the governing vessel, (which travels up the center of the spinal column, along the head to the front of the face) which meets the conception vessel, (that runs up the front of the body) are not focused on in reflexology. (It is important to note here as a reminder that this course gives you only a concise and short introduction to a vast amount of knowledge.)

There is a reference to this in the manuals students receive in class. You will learn the location on the toes and fingers of each meridian, then the student will refer to the chart provided for more information about that meridian. Remember that excesses or deficiencies are what you are looking for. (For example, when observing the nail beds, look for hangnails, cuts, ridges, color, past history of fractures, and in-grown toenails.) Begin to note correlations between what you observe on the hands and feet, the reflexology points, the meridians, and the client history. Think of yourself as a detective, then as an educator, and finally as a facilitator. Remember you are finding clues, not diagnosing conditions. These are clues to support your client's journey of balance and good health. If the concepts of meridians and chi are new to you, I suggest that you read the book my favorite book *Staying Healthy with the Seasons* by Elson Haas Another way to come to understanding Chinese medicine is by receiving acupuncture or acupressure try it. This will help you better communicate the concept of "chi" to your clients.

ZONES (and why the Charts are Different)

Zones have long been the predominant theory in the practice of reflexology. It is often called Zone Therapy. The zones represent lines of energy that create the zones both horizontal and the vertical zones. The vertical zones are easy to image with each toe creating a zone. Combining the vertical and horizontal zones the practitioner will apply this grid to both the feet and the body to locate reflex points and areas. It is when we study the horizontal zones of various practitioners/teachers that the charts differ most.

Eunice Ingham's chart shows vertical zones, but only mentions abdominal (horizontal) zones. Hanne Marquardt, who studied with Ingham, emphasizes three zones, with the second horizontal zone dividing at the waist line. Laura Norman uses more horizontal dividing lines, including a zone line at the waist, which divides the upper and lower abdomen, and makes another division at the thoracic area. Inge Dougans includes zone lines but places more emphasis on the role of meridians in the energy of the feet. I have tried to discern where these energetic dividing lines are by using my seven years of experience as an x-ray technician and by using my 30 years of experience in massage and foot reflexology. In all likelihood we differ in our opinions because we see these lines differently. I encourage my students to study the work of many practitioners, learn from them and also learn from personal experience.

Many charts show the neck reflex point under the big toe as a short area, just the neck of the big toe. I believe the neck line is longer, and includes the entire head and neck area, including C-7 and the thyroid. You will note on my charts that this area is shown as the entire big toe to the joint line. When you assess the location of the solar plexus point, I believe that you treat the foot as the whole body rather than just half the body. If we look at the zones as a grid, we look at the left foot as the left side of the body and the right foot as the right side of the body. When determining the location of the solar plexus point, I teach that each foot be perceived as the whole body which then places the point in the center of the foot (and also in the center of the body.) This is also a powerful meridian point, it is the beginning of the kidney meridian. (It is "Kidney 1".)

This demonstrates why multiple systems need be taken into account in your practice. Even if in the beginning it doesn't make sense to you, there are many systems overlapping and integrating with each other. It is for this, among other reasons, that I advocate using the grid system of zone theory as a basic location system, and not as an absolute science. Another disparity found on reflexology charts is the location of the large intestine. A number of charts place the large intestine below the waistline. I x-rayed many large intestines in barium

enema procedures and I disagree with this placement. The transverse colon of the large intestines sits above the waistline and the splenic flexure actually sits below the anterior ribs.

The kidney point is also shown in different locations. Some show it with the waistline passing through the middle of the kidney. I see and feel the kidney point to be located with the base of the kidney at the waistline and the last posterior rib. It sits laterally on either side of the spine. (This I confirmed by the positioning of my patients when x-raying kidneys.)

The Zone Theory also brought about the popular technique of finger and thumb walking compression with the grandmother of reflexology, Eunice Ingham. By using compression on the bottoms of the feet, at each of the reflex points, crystalline deposits are broken down. This increases the activity of the circulatory, lymph, and nervous systems. When these deposits are discovered by the reflexologist's hands, the zones on the foot can be transposed onto the patient's body, and not only will congestion be relieved, but the practitioner will gain insight into the client's internal health condition. This is an excellent technique to use some of the time. I encourage my practitioners to use a variety of hand positions and techniques to breakup crystals and effect a change in that area of the client's body.

PROPRIOCEPTORS

There are approximately 7,200 nerve endings in each foot. There are more receptors, (a type of sensory nerve,) in the hands and feet than anywhere else in the body. These receptors tell us where we are located in space. They send information up to the brain, and bring back the appropriate response. For example, my feet are telling me that I am on a flat wooden floor. If I were outside walking barefoot in the grass, they would tell me if the grass was wet or thick and the various temperatures and textures I encountered. With the advent of the industrial revolution most people left rural areas, built and moved into cities, and began working in industry and commerce. The buildings had flat floors, in contrast to the land that had been left behind. Eventually the floors were made of concrete, (even when a different substance was used as a floor covering.) The streets were first made of cobblestone, then brick, then asphalt and concrete.

People no longer walked through fields and meadows and over hills, rocks, roots, and riverbeds. They walked on flat and non-yielding surfaces and there was little variation in terrain and walking experiences. The proprioceptors in the feet gradually deadened without the multiple stimuli. (Think of how your feet feel after a day of walking around an outdoor fair where the ground is concrete. Your feet feel dead from the ankle down or they are painful. Compare that to a day of walking on the beach barefoot.) Feet become numbed to information. The reflexology treatment will break up, or break down, (depending on your perspective) the accumulated

crystals and tissue build-up around the nerve endings in our feet. When this happens, new information is sent to the brain and back, giving us a renewed sense of feeling and of “being” in our feet. We are better able to understand where we are located, and how to stand in balance. This in turn helps the organs function, the nerves perform better and our bodies are less congested.

The field of Neuro-immunology now tells us that nerves are hollow and in 1977 we learned that the nervous and lymph systems are actually connected. The exciting work of Candace Pert in her ground breaking book *Molecules of Emotions* states that neuro-chemicals, information and emotions flow throughout the body via the nerves and are deposited in the tissues. The lymph system then processes these deposits. Since so many nerve endings are affected during a reflexology session, the brain experiences an endorphin response. Most clients become very relaxed, and even sleepy. This is incredibly helpful for people in chronic pain, and for people who are dying, because nature’s endorphins give organic pain relief. (For me personally, this effect is much more pronounced during a reflexology session than during a full body massage because of the increased nerve ending stimulation of the feet. Many of my clients have shared with me their experiences of relaxation during reflexology treatments. They often experience a sense of relaxation so great they feel as if their bodies are “floating”.)

Without a doubt, few consider the feet to be “intelligent” and it is almost a certainty that the feet are never allowed to live up to their full potential. I find it imperative for practitioners to understand the value of this information about the receptors in the feet. So much of health revolves around intra-body communication. The more we can do to enhance the communication avenues and processes within the complex bodies we inhabit, the healthier we become.