



*Ontario College of  
Reflexology*

# **History and Theory of Reflexology**

*N101 - Foot Reflexology Course*



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## History of Reflexology

The oldest documentation of the use of reflexology is found in Egypt. Early Egyptian artists observed and recorded scenes of daily life, which included the medical practices of the times. Ed and Ellen Case of Los Angeles toured Egypt in 1979. During their travels, they discovered and brought back an ancient Egyptian papyrus scene depicting medical practitioners treating the hands and feet of their patients in approximately 2,500 BC. The tomb of Ankhmahor (a physician of high esteem) at Saqqara is where the scene depicting the practice of reflexology is to be found.

Figure 1-1



In Europe, a form of reflexology called *Zone Therapy* was developed in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century which was used throughout Europe.

Dr. William Fitzgerald (1872 - 1942) is credited with being the father of modern reflexology. He discovered zone therapy as practised by the “Red Indians.” Several tribes of North American Indians used pressure to the feet as a source of healing. Jenny Wallace, a full-blooded Cherokee Indian from North Carolina says the clan of her father (Bear Clan) believe feet are important. “*Your feet walk upon the earth and through this, your spirit is connected to the universe. Our feet are our contact with the Earth and the energies that flow through it.*”

Dr. Fitzgerald’s studies brought about the development and practice of reflexology in the United States. His medical degree came from the University of Vermont in 1895. He practised in Boston; then in London at a nose and throat hospital; then on to Vienna where he discovered the art of pressure therapy. He returned to the United States to Hartford (St. Francis Hospital, Nose & Throat) and found that pressure in the nose, mouth, throat, tongue, hands, feet, joints, etc., deadened definite areas of sensation and relieved pain. This led to the discovery of **Zone Therapy**.

Dr. Joe Shelby Riley of Washington, D.C., studied many therapies, including surgery, physiotherapy, chiropractic, zone therapy, osteopathy, naturopathy, electro therapy, colour and light therapy. Dr. Riley used this method in his practice for years.

Eunice Ingham (1879 - 1974) worked with Dr. Riley as his therapist in the early 1930's in Florida. As doctors were not interested in reflexology, she contributed greatly in helping people help themselves with this method. She shared her techniques and knowledge with many. In 1938, her book “*Stories the Feet Can Tell*” was published and in 1951 she wrote “*Stories the Feet Have Told*.” In the 1960's, she wrote “*Stories the Feet Are Telling*.” She died in 1974 and her nephew Dwight Byers is still carrying on her work.

Mildred Carter was another renowned woman in the world of reflexology. Her book “*Helping Yourself with Foot Reflexology*” sold more than 500,000 copies, bringing greater recognition to Reflexology.

The founders of the Ontario College of Reflexology were hosts to the first International Council of Reflexologists conference in Toronto, Canada in 1990. Professor Donald Bisson, the Dean of OCR is dedicated to expanding the education of Reflexology worldwide.

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# Theory of Reflexology

## What Is Reflexology?

Reflexology is a focussed pressure technique, usually directed at the feet or hands. It is based on the premise that there are zones and reflexes on different parts of the body which correspond to and are relative to all parts, glands and organs of the entire body.

## How Does It Work?

When the reflexes are stimulated, the body's natural electrical energy works along the **nervous system** to clear any blockages in the corresponding zones. A reflexology session seems to break up deposits (felt as a sandy or gritty area beneath the skin) which may interfere with the body's electrical energy in the nervous system.

Manipulating specific reflexes removes stress, activating a parasympathetic response in the body to enable the blockages to be released by a physiological change in the body. With stress removed and circulation enhanced, the body is allowed to return to a state of **homeostasis**.

Homeostasis\* is the “*automatic*” process that the body incorporates to bring it back to the “*normal*” state. For example, if the blood pressure is abnormal, the kidneys will secrete the enzyme *renin* which is involved with blood pressure, and the hormone *erythropoietin* that increases the rate of red blood cell production.

\* 1. - “The physiological process by which the internal systems of the body are maintained at equilibrium, despite variations in the external conditions.” (*The Bantam Medical Dictionary*, 1990, p. 204)

2. - “Homeostasis is the state of equilibrium of the internal environment of the body that is maintained by the dynamic processes of feedback and regulation.” (*Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, Philadelphia, F.A. Davis, 1981, p. 667)

3. - “Self-regulating maintenance of the metabolic or psychologic processes which are necessary for survival.” (*The New Lexicon Illustrated Medical Encyclopedia and Guide to Family Health*, New York, R.E. Rothenberg, 1988, p. 597)

## What Are the Benefits?

Reflexology demonstrates **four (4) main benefits**.

1. Relaxation with the removal of stress.
2. Enhanced circulation.
3. Assists the body to normalize the metabolism naturally.
4. Complements all other healing modalities.

## Reflexologists Do Not:

1. Diagnose medical conditions unless qualified to do so.
2. Prescribe medications unless qualified to do so.
3. Treat for specific conditions except in emergencies.
4. Work in opposition to the medical or other fields.
5. Encourage the client to cease taking their prescribed medication.

**Reflexologists do not diagnose medical conditions unless qualified to do so.** The only diagnosis made is a “**tender reflex**.” A reflexologist will refer to other qualified health care practitioners when services required are outside the reflexologist's scope of practice.

Similarly, **reflexologists do not prescribe medications unless qualified to do so.** The therapeutic intervention is limited to “*working the reflexes*.”

## Indications and Reasons for Referral:

Types of people seeking reflexology sessions are of all ages, but approximately 70% are female. These people are usually health conscious and wish to explore complimentary health alternatives. The vast majority of clients usually realize the benefits of reducing stress from a reflexology session which in turn minimizes physiological symptoms.

Usually, referrals are made in conjunction with other existing forms of therapy to supplement ongoing medical treatments. Reflexology has been known to help clients deal with physiological symptoms such as the side effects of cancer chemotherapy.

Reflexology may be performed on everyone, from the newborn to the elderly. It can be used for a general “*tune-up*” or for an unhealthy body. It can be used throughout pregnancy, or pre surgically and post surgically. In all cases, common sense should be used in selecting this therapy.

## Practical Applications:

### Frequency of Visits:

When a client asks when the next visit will be, the reflexologist explains to the client that the benefits of the session will go on working for five or more days. Beyond this, the reflexologist cannot guess the client’s requirements. The frequency of the client’s next visit(s) will be determined by the client based on their requirements and expectations. The client may decide to return in a week, a month or six months. The reflexologist has no way to measure how much stress the client has gathered or the state of their health since the last visit.

Reflexologists who say ‘*I want to see you three times a week for six months*’ without just cause are considering their own pockets instead of the true requirements of the client.

### Length of Session:

A complete session on both feet is always performed. Depending upon the reflexologist’s level of experience and the client’s requirements, sessions will last between 45 to 60 minutes.

### Pressure:

Reflexes are worked according to the body’s requirements. Stress removal is the first priority; followed by enhanced circulation with attention paid to reflexes relative to the body requirements. Pressure exerted by the reflexologist usually ranges from 0 to 10 or 20 pounds. Common sense dictates when less pressure is required.

A firm pressure is used when working the reflexes of the feet. We work within the pain threshold of the client. As an indicator, use a scale from 1 to 5, with 1 being sensitive and 5 being painful. Encourage the person to let you know when they experience any discomfort, and adjust your pressure accordingly. **Reflexology is not meant to inflict pain.** You can test this on yourself by applying pressure on your arm until it becomes uncomfortable.

#### How Much Pressure?

Pressure used in reflexology ranges from 0 to 10 or 20 lbs. Try pressing on a bathroom scale with your finger or thumb to get a feel for the pressure required.

Communication with the client is essential. Ask whether the pressure is too light or too great. It is important to remember that when tender reflexes are located, they must be worked with a degree of pressure to effect the desired result. Massaging or pampering the foot may feel good but does nothing to stimulate the reflexes and to assist the body's natural response to normalize the metabolisms. Well-worked reflexes prove to the client the necessity of pressure by the process that homeostasis has brought to the body. The reflexologist always works **within** the pain tolerance threshold of the individual.

## Tenderness:

What affects tenderness?

1. *Injury*.
2. *Surgery* - both pre-surgery and post-surgery.
3. General or specific *stress* (more than 80% of North American disease is related to stress). Stress can affect all reflexes.
4. *Drugs* - prescription or non-prescription. They may numb reflexes.
5. *Illness*.
6. *Foot conditions*: corns, calluses, spurs, etc.
7. *Piriformis Muscle Syndrome* (short leg).

## Therapy Setting:

The optimum location is a quiet, relaxing environment with the client comfortably seated. A recliner chair is most suitable as the reflexologist and the client can see eye-to-eye. In reality, reflexology can be administered anywhere - sitting up or lying down. Receiving the therapy when necessary is more important than waiting for optimum session conditions.

## Client's Responsibility

1. The client practises cleanliness.
2. The client sits comfortably in a reclining chair for the session for eye-to-eye contact with the reflexologist.
3. The client gives the reflexologist a **completed and signed Reflexology Health Record** (with consent given) and **accepts responsibility for the session**.
4. The client tells the reflexologist the pain tolerance threshold.
5. The client may enjoy the session and perhaps fall asleep.
6. The client is encouraged to rest upon returning home while the body is in the *parasympathetic response*.
7. It is suggested that the client drink a glass of water to help cleanse toxins released from a session.

## Reflexologist's Responsibility

1. The reflexologist practises hand cleanliness.
2. The reflexologist keeps finger nails trimmed.
3. The reflexologist keeps long hair under control and is aware of any jewellery that may retard the session.
4. The reflexologist provides a professional and comfortable environment.
5. The reflexologist provides warmth, tissues and wet-cloths for the client's requirements if necessary.
6. Relaxing music may be played.
7. A **Reflexology Health Record** is taken and the **client signs a consent on the form accepting responsibility for the session**.
8. It is the responsibility of the reflexologist to keep all client records and sessions **confidential**. Records are to be dated and recorded in ink only.
9. The reflexologist removes the client's socks **only**.

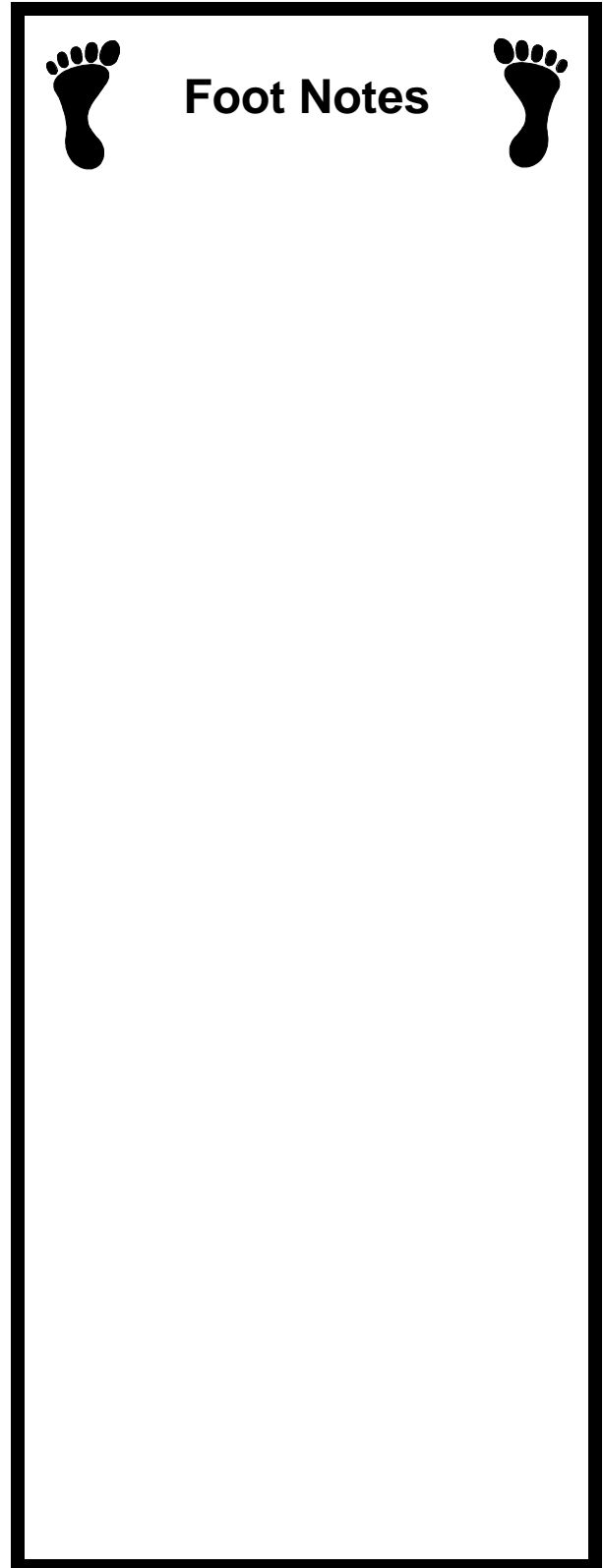


10. The client's bare feet are worked on (hands where necessary) or over socks in emergencies.
  11. A thorough foot examination is done by the reflexologist.
  12. Conversation is encouraged and the reflexologist is a good listener (*Reflexologists are not psychologists*).
  13. The reflexologist works within a time frame by which the client does not feel rushed and has time for questions.
  14. **Optional** - Olive oil may be used at the **end** of the session by the reflexologist. **Do not use** any creams or oils (other than olive oil). They may contain perfumes that may cause an allergic reaction.
  15. The reflexologist documents the results of the reflexology session.
8. Cleanliness of the work environment and supplies are very important to prevent contamination of both reflexologist and client.

## Occupational Hazards

**R**eflexologist-related injuries can result if proper techniques are not practised:

1. The finger nails of a reflexologist's hands usually grow faster than normal due to the stimulation of the fingers during a session.
2. Contagious disease can be collected beneath the reflexologist's finger nails if not washed properly after each session.
3. Long finger nails can inflict scratches or cuts on the client's feet.
4. Cuts or open sores on the reflexologist's hands could expose the reflexologist to any pathological conditions that may be present on the client's feet.
5. **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome** can result if the reflexologist strains the hands, fingers and wrists. Take frequent breaks and exercise as often as necessary.
6. Improper posture will result in discomfort or pain in the shoulders, neck and arms.
7. Lack of back support can result in low back and/or hip pains.



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# Chapter Summary

## History of Reflexology

- C Oldest documentation of reflexology was found in Egypt in approximately 2,500 BC in an ancient papyrus scene depicting reflexology.
- C Zone Therapy was developed in Europe in the late 14<sup>th</sup> century and used throughout Europe.
- C Dr. William Fitzgerald, “*father of modern reflexology*”, discovered zone therapy used by several North American Indians and introduced reflexology in the United States.
- C Dr. Fitzgerald developed **Zone Therapy** which was also used by Dr. Riley.
- C Early authors of reflexology books include Eunice Ingham and Mildred Carter.

## What Is Reflexology?

Reflexology is a focussed pressure technique, usually directed at the feet or hands. It is based on the premise that there are zones and reflexes on different parts of the body which correspond to and are relative to all parts, glands and organs of the entire body.

## How Does It Work?

When the reflexes are stimulated, the body’s natural electrical energy works along the **nervous system** to clear any blockages in the corresponding zones. A reflexology session seems to break up deposits (felt as a sandy or gritty area beneath the skin) which may interfere with the body’s electrical energy in the nervous system.

Manipulating specific reflexes removes stress, activating a parasympathetic response in the body to enable the blockages to be released by a physiological change in the body. With stress removed and circulation enhanced, the body is allowed to return to a state of homeostasis.

Homeostasis is the “*automatic*” process that the body incorporates to bring it back to the “*normal*” state. For example, if the blood pressure is abnormal, the kidneys will secrete the enzyme *renin* which is involved with blood pressure, and the hormone *erythropoietin* that increase the rate of red blood cell production.

## Four (4) Benefits of Reflexology:

1. Relaxation with the removal of stress.
2. Enhanced circulation.
3. Assists the body to normalize the metabolisms naturally.
4. Complements all other healing modalities.

## Reflexologists Do Not:

1. Diagnose medical conditions unless qualified to do so.
2. Prescribe medications unless qualified to do so.
3. Treat for specific conditions except in emergencies.
4. Work in opposition to the medical or other fields.
5. Encourage the client to cease taking their prescribed medication.

**Reflexologists do not diagnose medical conditions unless qualified to do so.** The only diagnosis made is a “**tender reflex.**” A reflexologist will refer to other qualified health care practitioners when services required are outside the reflexologist’s scope of practice.

Similarly, **reflexologists do not prescribe medications unless qualified to do so.** The therapeutic intervention is limited to “*working the reflexes.*”

## Indications and Reasons for Referral:

- C Types of people seeking reflexology sessions are of all ages but approx. 70% are female.
- C Referrals are made in conjunction with other existing forms of therapy to supplement ongoing medical treatments.
- C Reflexology has been known to help clients deal with physiological symptoms such as cancer chemotherapy.
- C Reflexology can be performed on everyone.

## Practical Applications:

### Frequency of Visits:

- C The benefits of a session usually will go on working for 5 or more days.
- C The client decides on the frequency of visits based on the client’s requirements and expectations.

### Length of Session:

- C A complete session on both feet is always performed which will last between 45 to 60 minutes.

### Pressure:

- C Work within the client's pain tolerance with exerted pressure which ranges from 0 to 10 or 20 pounds.
- C When tender reflexes are located, they should be worked with a degree of pressure to effect the desired result.
- C The client should tell the reflexologist their threshold level of tender reflexes.
- C Reflexes are worked according to the body's requirements.

### Tenderness:

- C Stress
- C Surgery
- C Injury and illness
- C Drugs
- C Foot conditions
- C Piriformis Muscle Syndrome

### Therapy Setting:

- C Optimum location is a quiet, relaxing environment.
- C A recliner chair is most suitable for eye-to-eye contact.
- C Reflexology can be administered anywhere and anytime.

### Client's Responsibility:

1. Client practises cleanliness.
2. Client sits comfortably in a reclining chair for eye-to-eye contact with the reflexologist.
3. Client gives the reflexologist a **completed and signed Reflexology Health Record** (with consent given) and **accepts responsibility for the session**.
4. Client tells the reflexologist the pain tolerance threshold.
5. Client may enjoy the session and perhaps fall asleep.
6. Client is encouraged to rest upon returning home while the body is in the *parasympathetic response*.
7. It is suggested that the client drink a glass of water to help cleanse toxins released from a session.

### Reflexologist's Responsibility:

1. Practises hand cleanliness.
2. Keeps finger nails trimmed.
3. Keep long hair under control and is aware of any jewellery that may retard the session.
4. Provides a professional and comfortable environment.
5. Provides warmth, tissues and wet-cloths for the client's requirements if necessary.

6. Relaxing music may be played.
7. A **Reflexology Health Record** is taken and the client **signs a consent on the form accepting responsibility for the session**.
8. All client records and sessions are kept **confidential**. Records are to be dated and recorded in ink only.
9. The client's socks are removed **only**.
10. The client's bare feet are worked on (hands where necessary) or over socks in emergencies.
11. A thorough foot examination is done by the reflexologist.
12. Conversation is encouraged and the reflexologist is a good listener. (*Reflexologists are not psychologists*).
13. Works within a time frame by which the client does not feel rushed and has time for questions.
14. **Optional** - Olive oil may be used at the **end** of the session by the reflexologist. **Do not use** any creams or oils (other than olive oil) . They may contain perfumes that may cause an allergic reaction.
15. The results of the reflexology session are documented.

### Occupational Hazards:

1. The finger nails of a reflexologist's hands usually grow faster than normal due to the stimulation of the fingers during a session.
2. Contagious disease can be collected beneath the reflexologist's finger nails if not washed properly after each session.
3. Long finger nails can inflict scratches or cuts on the client's feet.
4. Cuts or open sores on the reflexologist's hands could expose the reflexologist to any pathological conditions that may be present on the client's feet.
5. **Carpal Tunnel Syndrome** can result if the reflexologist strains the hands, fingers and wrists. Take frequent breaks and exercise as often as necessary.
6. Improper posture will result in discomfort or pain in the shoulders, neck and arms.
7. Lack of back support can result in low back and/or hip pains.
8. Cleanliness of the work environment and supplies are very important to prevent contamination of both reflexologist and client.



# Foot Notes



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# N101 - Chapter 1 Test

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

1. Reflexology is a \_\_\_\_\_, usually directed at the \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_. It is based on the premise that there are \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ on different parts of the body which correspond to and are relative to all \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ of the entire body.

2. List the benefits of reflexology:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_

3. Reflexologists Do Not:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_
4. \_\_\_\_\_
5. \_\_\_\_\_

**True or False** - Check the correct answer (✓) in the appropriate box (one only).

4. " True " False - Europe used reflexology before the Egyptians.
5. " True " False - An Egyptian papyrus scene depicting reflexology is dated 500 B.C.
6. " True " False - Eunice Ingham wrote many books on reflexology.
7. " True " False - Dr. Fitzgerald taught reflexology to the North American Indians.
8. " True " False - A session seems to break up deposits which may interfere with the body's electrical energy.
9. " True " False - Reflexologists do not diagnose medical conditions.
10. " True " False - Reflexologists can prescribe medications.
11. " True " False - 70% of people seeking reflexology sessions are female.
12. " True " False - Reflexology cannot be done on anyone.
13. " True " False - Clients can determine the frequency of visits.
14. " True " False - A complete session can take as little as 10 minutes.
15. " True " False - Pressure on the reflexes can be as much as 75 pounds.
16. " True " False - Stress cannot affect the tenderness of the reflexes.
17. " True " False - More than 80% of disease is related to stress.
18. " True " False - Reflexology can be administered anywhere.
19. " True " False - The client gives the reflexologist an affidavit.
20. " True " False - The reflexologist can remove the client's shirt.
21. " True " False - The reflexologist practices hand cleanliness.
22. " True " False - A thorough foot examination is done by the reflexologist.
23. " True " False - Perfume can be applied to the client's feet before starting a session.
24. " True " False - *Carpal Tunnel Syndrome* is an occupational hazard.
25. " True " False - The reflexologist should practice good posture.



# Foot Notes

