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Dr. Dalveer Singh Kaunteya
Assistant Professor, KR PG
College, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh,
India

Use of foot massage for relaxation

Dr. Dalveer Singh Kaunteya

Abstract

The physical aspect of the massage – the manipulation and massage of muscles – provides a therapeutic effect in and of itself. Massage is a scientific method of manipulating the soft tissues of the body to have specific effect. Massage can stimulate and relax the body the mind. The skin, blood & lymphatic system are stimulated. As tense muscles relax stiff joints loosen nerves are soothed, an allover feeling of relaxation well-being comes. A soothing and relaxing foot massage improves the blood circulation. This helps in getting a peaceful sleep. Relieves body pains: If done carefully, it treats pains and aches such as headaches, migraines, and neck pain, lower and upper backaches. At the end of a long day, many people enjoy giving or receiving a foot massage. Foot massage can aid relaxation and may relieve muscle aches. The benefits of Reflexology is that it stimulates thousands of nerve endings in the feet. The most obvious benefit of reflexology. Stress reduction is achieved by specifically massaging key nerves in the feet with firm, yet painless repetitive motions, to relax the muscles. This removes pressure caused by stress and also helps clear the mind, leaving you feeling calm and de-stressed. Human feet contain 26 bones, 33 joints, and a network of over 100 tendons connected to thousands of nerves. Reflexology stimulates more than 7000 nerves in the feet wonderfully encouraging the opening and clearing of neural pathways.

Keywords: Soft tissues, foot massage

Introduction

Massage is the manipulation of soft tissues in the body. Massage techniques are commonly applied with hands, fingers, elbows, knees, forearms, feet, or a device. The purpose of massage is generally for the treatment of body stress or pain. Life can be stressful. But there are many benefits of reflexology that you should know about. Often times you need more than a serious back and shoulder massage. Another option to try is reflexology. There are countless benefits of the application of pressure to certain reflex points on your feet At the end of a long day, many people enjoy giving or receiving a foot massage. Foot massage can aid relaxation and may relieve muscle aches. A person who was professionally trained to give massages was traditionally known as a masseur (male) or a masseuse (female), but those titles are outmoded, and carry some negative connotations. In the United States, the title massage therapist has been recognized as a business norm for those who have been professionally trained to give massages.

So with all the benefits to gain, and nothing to lose, why not have a go today? Given that there seems to be no particular type of massage that is any better than any other, there are many paths to choose from. You could go to a professional masseuse, get a partner to have a go, or just do it yourself. Whatever option you choose. Reflexology can be effectively used to reduce pain. It has long been used to treat pain caused by arthritis, migraine, and fibromyalgia. It is also medically recommended to help cope with both post-operative surgical rehabilitation and rehabilitation after an injury. Cancer patients find reflexology sessions profoundly help treat chemotherapy-induced nausea. Women in labor or those who experience severe menstrual cramps also attest to reduced pain due to this technique. Lastly, reflexology has been effective in treating patients with chronic back and neck pains.

There are many ways to massage feet that are easy to try at home. This article gives step-by-step instructions for 12-foot massage techniques. Read on to find out how to massage feet. techniques.

Correspondence
Dr. Dalveer Singh Kaunteya
Assistant Professor, KR PG
College, Mathura, Uttar Pradesh,
India

Massage techniques

Here are 12-foot massage techniques that a person can use on themselves or another person.

1. Warmup twists



Fig 1: Warm up twists foot massage technique

Warm up twists are one way to start a foot massage. To use this technique

- place the palms on either side of the foot
- gently pull the right side of the foot forward while pushing the left side back
- push the left side of the foot back while pulling the right side forward
- repeat this twisting motion, working the hands from the ankle to the toes
- The gentle twisting motion helps warm up the foot in preparation for further massage.

2. Arch Rub



Fig 2: Arch rubs foot massage technique

People can use arch rubs to massage the underside of the foot. To use this technique:

- hold the top of the foot in one hand
- with the fingers of the other hand, rub the length of the arch
- Do this repeatedly, from the heel to the ball of the foot

3. Toe bends



Fig 3: Toe bends flexibility foot massage technique

Toe bends may encourage flexibility in the foot. To use this foot massage technique:

- hold the heel with one hand
- bend all the toes on one foot back and forth at the same time with the other hand
- repeat this movement, gently increasing pressure and flexing the toes to their full range of motion

4. Foot spread



Fig 4: Foot spreading foot massage technique

Foot spreading may help the foot expand to its natural width. To use this foot massage technique:

- hold each side of the foot
- pull each side of the foot outward
- Repeat this motion, allowing the foot to spread

5. Heel Squeeze



Fig 5: Heel squeezes foot massage technique

Heel squeezes may help relieve tension at the back of the foot. To use this technique

- hold the top of the foot in one hand
- hold the back of the heel in the other
- repeatedly squeeze and release the back of the heel

6. Knuckle OR fist work



Fig 6: Knuckle foot massage technique

Knuckle or fist work is a way to massage the bottom of the foot. To use this technique:

- hold the back of the foot with one hand
- hold a knuckle or full fist on the other hand against the bottom of the foot
- use the knuckle or fist to knead the bottom of the foot, using moderate pressure
- Repeat this motion, working down the ball of the foot to the heel

7. Thumb work



Fig 7: Thumb work foot massage technique

Thumb work is another foot massage technique that a person can practice on the bottom of the foot. To use this technique

- hold the foot with one hand on either side
- place the fingers on the top of the foot
- place the thumbs under each foot, on the toe pads
- use the thumbs to stroke down each toe, using moderate pressure
- move to the ball of the foot, repeating the downward stroke motion with the thumbs
- repeat this motion in the arch of the feet and the heel
- Continue for as long as it is enjoyable

8. Pressure points



Fig 8: Pressing points foot massage technique

Pressing points on the instep is another relaxing foot massage technique. To use this technique:

- use one hand to support the top of the foot
- use the thumb of the other hand to press and release the top of the instep
- gradually move down the instep, repeating this pressing motion
- Continue pressing and releasing, down to the back of the heel

9. Achilles massage



Fig 9: Achilles massage foot massage technique

Achilles massage may help relieve pressure on the Achilles tendon. To use this foot massage technique:

- grasp the Achilles tendon with the other hand, between the thumb and index finger
- use a stroking motion down toward the heel
- repeat this several times

10. Top and side circles



Fig 10: Top and side circles foot massage technique

Top and side circling is a simple foot massage technique.

To use it

- using both hands, support the foot from below
- extend the fingers and use them to make circles around the ankle on either side
- using a continuous circular movement, move the fingers around the side of the foot
- keep circling the fingers, continuing up to the toes
- Pay attention to the space between each tendon

11. Toe massage



Fig 11: Toe massage foot massage technique

Toe massage may help relieve tension and cramps in the toes.

To use this foot massage technique:

- hold the base of the foot with one hand
- with the fingers of the other hand, tug, twist, and pull each toe gently
- move from the outer to the inner toes
- repeat several times\
- Massage between each toe

12. Finishing strokes



Fig 12: Finishing strokes foot massage technique

People can use finishing strokes at the end of a foot massage To use this technique

- place the palms on either side of the foot
- gently pull the right side of the foot forward while pushing the left side back
- then push the left side of the foot back while pushing the right side forward
- repeat this twisting motion, working the hands from the ankle to the toes
- Lighten the pressure each time, gradually lifting the hands from the foot completely

Foot Massage tips

There is no one way to carry out a foot massage. Different people prefer different techniques. A person may want to test many techniques and learn what feels good for them or someone else.

Before getting started

- soak the feet in warm water, with or without a few drops of diluted essential oil
- pat the feet dry with a towel
- rest the feet on the towel
- spread massage oil over the foot, up to the ankle

Here are some general foot massage tips to use as a guide

- Pay attention to parts that feel sore: Work on sore areas for longer, with as much or as little pressure as feels comfortable.
- Pay attention to parts that feel good: If it is enjoyable, a person can continue.
- Avoid injuring the thumbs: Do not use so much pressure that the thumbs start to hurt. Use the strength of body weight, not muscles in thumbs, to apply pressure.
- Avoid using pressure that is too light, as this may tickle.
- Focus on one foot at a time.

Risks and Considerations

Before starting a foot massage, check the feet for

- cuts
- bandages
- athlete's foot

Other preexisting foot conditions, such as diabetic neuropathy, may also affect whether or not a person should have a foot massage. Certain conditions may make parts of the foot sensitive to pressure.

Pregnant women and those at risk for blood clots should seek medical advice before having a massage of the lower legs.

Benefits of Foot massage

A regular foot massage along with reflexology helps in promoting physiological as well as physical health.

Reflexology is an ancient healing practice based on the principle that there are reflex points on the feet that correspond to the body's different organs and glands. Remember that human foot is an evolutionary marvel, capable of handling hundreds of tons of force and your weight in motion. It has 42 muscles, 26 bones, 33 joints, 250,000 sweat glands and at least 50 ligaments and tendons—plus almost 15,000 nerve endings!

In reflexology pressure is applied to these reflexes on the feet, which promotes good health. Here are some health benefits of foot massage and reflexology:

Improves blood circulation

Due to a sedentary lifestyle, many people don't use their feet muscles properly, thus impeding good blood flow. Also, tight, pointed shoes—especially high heels—hinder circulation. Ten minutes of foot massage daily helps in transporting oxygen to the body's cells, which is essential for overall health.

Helps in relaxation

After a tiring and stressful day, a foot massage is a soothing and relaxing way to relax, particularly after a long day of standing and walking around, as the feet tend to swell up. Massage and reflexology of 5 to 10 minutes before going to bed can improve feelings of general well-being.

Promotes better sleep

The best time to do foot massage is before going to bed. A soothing and relaxing foot massage improves the blood circulation. This helps in getting a peaceful sleep.

Relieves body pains

This is the best part of reflexology. If done carefully, it treats pains and aches such as headaches, migraines, neck pain, lower and upper backaches.

Improves mood and fights depression

Foot massage and reflexology helps in fighting depression. Certain points on the feet are helpful in alleviating depression symptoms. Massaging these points or applying pressure to them for a few minutes 2 or 3 times a day can help relieve symptoms of depression.

Makes feet healthier

One easy way to help keep your feet healthy and free from foot problems is a regular foot massage. It helps stimulate the muscles around your feet, lessens stiffness and even reduces pain in the ankles or the heels. Plus, a short 5-minute foot massage daily will make your ankles strong and flexible, thus preventing unpleasant ankle and foot injuries.

Alleviates swelling (edema)

Regular foot massage during pregnancy can help reduce the effects of edema, which is swelling in the feet and ankles due to fluid retention. This is very common during pregnancy, especially in the last trimester.

Foot massage increases endorphins

It is no secret that endorphins are good for us. Whether through exercise or eating chocolate, endorphins act as happiness hormones, robbing us of pain and discomfort and leaving happiness in their wake.

Foot massage prompts the release of endorphins, which in turn promote benefits including decreased stress, increased happiness and assisting with pain management and management of some mental health conditions.

Foot massage activates parts of the brain associated with reward and pain control

The Cingulate cortex is responsible for many things, including pain moderation and the association between external events and memory and emotion. Thus, activation in this area of the brain suggests that foot massage may be useful when it comes to modifying the body's response to pain, and how it responds to certain stimuli.

Foot massage affects the brain, targeting both the brain's reward centres, as well as parts of the brain responsible for pain moderation.

Foot massage affects cortisol levels (Sometimes) and stress (Always)

This decrease in stress was not a discrete effect – foot massage was found to prompt a decrease in stress in healthy undergraduate students, women with postpartum depression and middle-aged women living in the countryside. This was even when the studies found no significant decrease in cortisol.

Foot Massage decreases stress levels. Some studies found only small decrease in cortisol levels associated with this, while some studies found statistically significant decreases in the stress hormone.

Foot massage decreases our perception of pain

Pain has many different causes. Ranging from the psychological, to neural, to purely physical, it often combines many of these elements, making it a difficult condition to

treat. If we look back at the ways that foot massage affects people, we see both physical effects and psychological effects. It provides social care, an increase in endorphins, and decreased stress

Massage also provides a social element. Someone is taking care of you. It also has the potential to address the source of the pain. Deep tissue massage and massage focuses on the joints, looking to immediately effect the cause of the pain.

Foot massage decreases nausea and vomiting

Barring a big night out, nausea and vomiting generally result from an upset stomach (in which case vomiting is probably the best thing for you), morning sickness, and the nausea and vomiting experienced by people in pain and cancer patients.

Foot massage helps maintain healthy blood pressure

Blood pressure is a major measure of a person's risk of cardiovascular disease. A higher blood pressure makes the heart work harder, resulting in increased stress and strain of cardiovascular muscle.

Blood pressure results from three different things – the force at which blood is expelled from the

Foot massage can therefore be used, in conjunction with its stress busting abilities, to help control blood pressure, and thus decrease the risk of heart disease.

Blood pressure is influenced by many factors including stress, heart rate, and blood volume, and foot massage can benefit them all. While not a be all and end all, it can be useful in managing underlying causes of high blood pressure.

Foot massage helps maintain a healthy heart rate

Like blood pressure, heart rate is tied to the function of the heart. If the heart beats too fast, several things can occur. In critical situations, the heart does not have enough time to fill with blood, and thus cannot supply an adequate blood supply to the rest of the body,

Foot massage benefits in the area of heart rate – it helps keep it within normal levels. This in turn assists the body in maintaining its normal equilibrium, and decreases the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Foot massage benefits the skin of our feet

With increased circulation, foot massage also brings about benefits to the skin on your feet. This may not seem as important as the skin on your face, but feet – like your hands – are the parts of our body that we put under the most pressure. We force them into uncomfortable shoes, walk barefoot, put pressure on our soles for hours.

Foot massage helps to manage anxiety

Given that we have already investigated how foot massage decreases stress, increases endorphins, provides a sense of closeness and assists with pain management, it should come as no surprise that foot massage also helps relieve feeling of anxiety.

Foot massage helps manage depression

Depression, like anxiety, is a disease that is multifaceted and complicated. With foot massage addressing both biological and social triggers for depression, it presents a useful tool to help in the management of the condition.

Foot massage can assist with muscle soreness

Muscle soreness is generally the thing that people think about first when it comes to massage. As previously mentioned, we

humans put our feet through quite a bit of abuse – walking all day in inappropriate shoes, not paying attention to how long we spend on our feet– it is easy to see how muscle soreness develops in the feet.

Muscle soreness inhibits people’s efforts both in their everyday lives, and their sporting endeavours. By decreasing the amount of pain that results from using our muscles, foot massage allows for rapid recovery.

Foot massage can help decrease joint pain

Along with muscle soreness, joint pain is one of the main complaints for people that use foot massage as a tool of their daily life. Joint pain can occur for many reasons – from arthritis, to general stiffness, to post injury pain. It is something that affects large populations of people

Foot massage focuses on areas of tension

Joint pain hinders the efforts of people to live normal lives. Joint pain in the feet, especially, can have a significant effect as it makes walking and getting around difficult. Foot massage provides a way to decrease that pain, and thus improve the quality of life of those experiencing it.

Foot massage helps manage insomnia

Insomnia is a complicated beast. Like many issues to do with the brain, it is often multifactorial, having more than one root cause. Some of the causes include different drugs (like caffeine, nicotine, the medication you take for asthma), shift work, stress, depression, and pain. Sometimes we just don’t know the cause behind insomnia.

Foot massage addresses many of the causes of insomnia, helping to prevent the problem of not being able to sleep in the first place. It also presents an immediate sense of calm and being cared for – both things which prompt sleep.

Foot massage helps decrease the severity and length of headaches and migraines

Headaches and migraines occur for many reasons – stress, tiredness, infections, illness. Sometimes we have no idea what the cause or trigger is. Thus, therapy is often based on what has worked before for that individual. A lack of light, less sound, certain types of painkillers. Often though people have to work through migraines, using medications that sometimes work, sometimes don’t.

Here foot massage can be of assistance, not necessarily by replacing other therapies, but by working alongside them. We’ve already looked at how foot massage addresses some of the above causes – stress and insomnia. By treating these causes, foot massage is helping to prevent episodes from occurring in the first place. Headaches and migraines can be debilitating and extremely difficult to control. While foot massage does not provide the cure for these afflictions it does help in two ways. Firstly, it helps manage some of the causes of migraines and headaches. And secondly, it’s been shown to decrease the severity and length of these migraines and headaches, giving other coping methods a chance to work.

Foot massage helps with injury rehabilitation

Injuries can be debilitating, not only in the immediate, but also in their aftermath. Rehabilitation, building up strength, learning to use muscles and tendons again.

Injuries are never pleasant, and their recovery period can often stretch into the weeks and months. Foot massage offers a way of assisting with that recovery, both by addressing things that make recovery difficult, but also by addressing

immediate problems of tension in the feet and legs.

Summary

Massage therapies have been there for many years and different techniques of massage have been used for rehabilitating and recovering health conditions of human being. A foot massage not only revitalizes your body and offers comfort but it improves your thinking, nervous system, emotions and everything that is related to your brain function. If you want to relax your brains along with your body for better response with activities, it is important to make a foot massage part of your routine as an activity of promoting your well-being.

There are several components to foot massage. The physical aspect of the massage – the manipulation and massage of muscles – provides a therapeutic effect in and of itself². It increases blood flow, lymphatic drainage (the drainage of fluid from blood at its filtration before being put back into the circulatory system), and assists in the reduction of local joint pain^[3].

However studies have found other benefits to foot massage, such as decreasing pain, assisting in keeping blood and heart rate low, and helping with some mental health problems such as anxiety and depression. These benefits result from a combination of the physical effects of massage, and the psycho-social aspect of getting a foot massage^[4].

Most of the benefits above occur with any type of massage, though there are some benefits that are unique to foot massage, including increased balance, increased sensation and range of motion in the feet^[5]. Reflexology, a form of massage which we will also examine in this article, also tends to concentrate primarily on the feel.

Even in studies where there was no empirical evidence that could be measured (and in many cases there were biochemical changes that resulted from the foot massage), researchers acknowledged that foot massage had a positive outcome on the people who used it, and that as a alternative medicine, it has a great many applications alongside traditional medicine.

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