

# Sole Survivor

Reflexology goes feet first to heal,  
relax, and ease what ails you

By Matthew Solan

**D**wight Byers presses his large, thick thumb along the side of my right big toe and I'm quite certain I'm going to pass out. Isn't reflexology about getting a relaxing foot massage? I tense up as he focuses on a specific spot. "Tight neck?" he asks. "How did he know that?" I wonder. I glance at the reflexology chart on the wall—a picture of two giant feet done in a multi-colored format—and I see that, sure enough, he's working the area of my foot that coincides with my neck. After a few passes, the intense sensation fades, and I feel pressure and tension lift from my neck and shoulders.

He moves along. His hands are strong like a woodworker but with the sensitive touch of a blind man. "How's that feel?" Byers asks as he firmly

presses into the base of my third toe. Before I can answer, he already analyzed my condition: tight lower back, no doubt from long hours at the Mac. Amazing. There seems to be more to reflexology than meets the eye, or rather, foot. As he moves across my forefoot—kneading it, then sliding both thumbs across my arch, which makes me sink deeper into my oversized La-Z-Boy—he gives me a quick rundown on reflexology.

## Mapping the foot

Its principle is quite simple, Byers explains: Certain reflex areas of the foot represent specific body areas, glands, and organs. By properly stimulating these reflex points, you can directly condition your shoulders, back, or hip, or even soothe your stomach, bladder, or intestines. "When you have congestion or tension in the body, it shows up in the feet," explains



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## What to Expect

- A reflexologist first conducts a brief health evaluation to pinpoint certain conditions and locate what areas

within your body need the most attention.

- Therapists use powder on the feet so they can more easily manipulate reflex points.

- The amount of pressure and hand, finger, and thumb movements vary depending on what areas the therapist works. He or she may use stroking, knuckle-kneading, thumb-sliding, fist-sliding, toe-loosening, rocking, rotating, or shaking.

- Sessions usually last from 30 minutes to an hour and may be part of a four- to eight-week course of therapy, depending on your condition.

- Reflexology is often not covered by medical insurance. Prices range from \$30 to \$60, depending on the clinic.

- People with recent foot injuries should avoid reflexology. Also, those with severe circulation problems in the legs and feet should first consult with their doctor.

- Qualified and properly trained reflexologists are certified in the Ingham Method or graduated from a reflexology school. To find a certified reflexologist, contact the international Institute of Reflexology ([www.reflexology-usa.net](http://www.reflexology-usa.net)) or the American Reflexology Certification Board ([www.arcb.net](http://www.arcb.net)).



Byers, who is president of the International Institute of Reflexology in St. Petersburg, Florida. The body's right side is represented by the right foot; and the left side, by the left foot. Paired organs like the lungs are divided between the feet: right lung with right foot and vice versa. Single organs are located on only one foot; for example, the gallbladder is on the right foot, while the spleen is on the left. (See chart below for a complete reflexology map.) Reflexology can also be applied to the hands and ears.

How reflexology works, I discovered, is more complex. Several theories abound, although none have been scientifically proven. A popular one believes stimulating the foot releases unblocked energy, or chi, and allows it to flow more freely to various areas of the body, much like the philosophy of acupuncture. Medical explanations are more

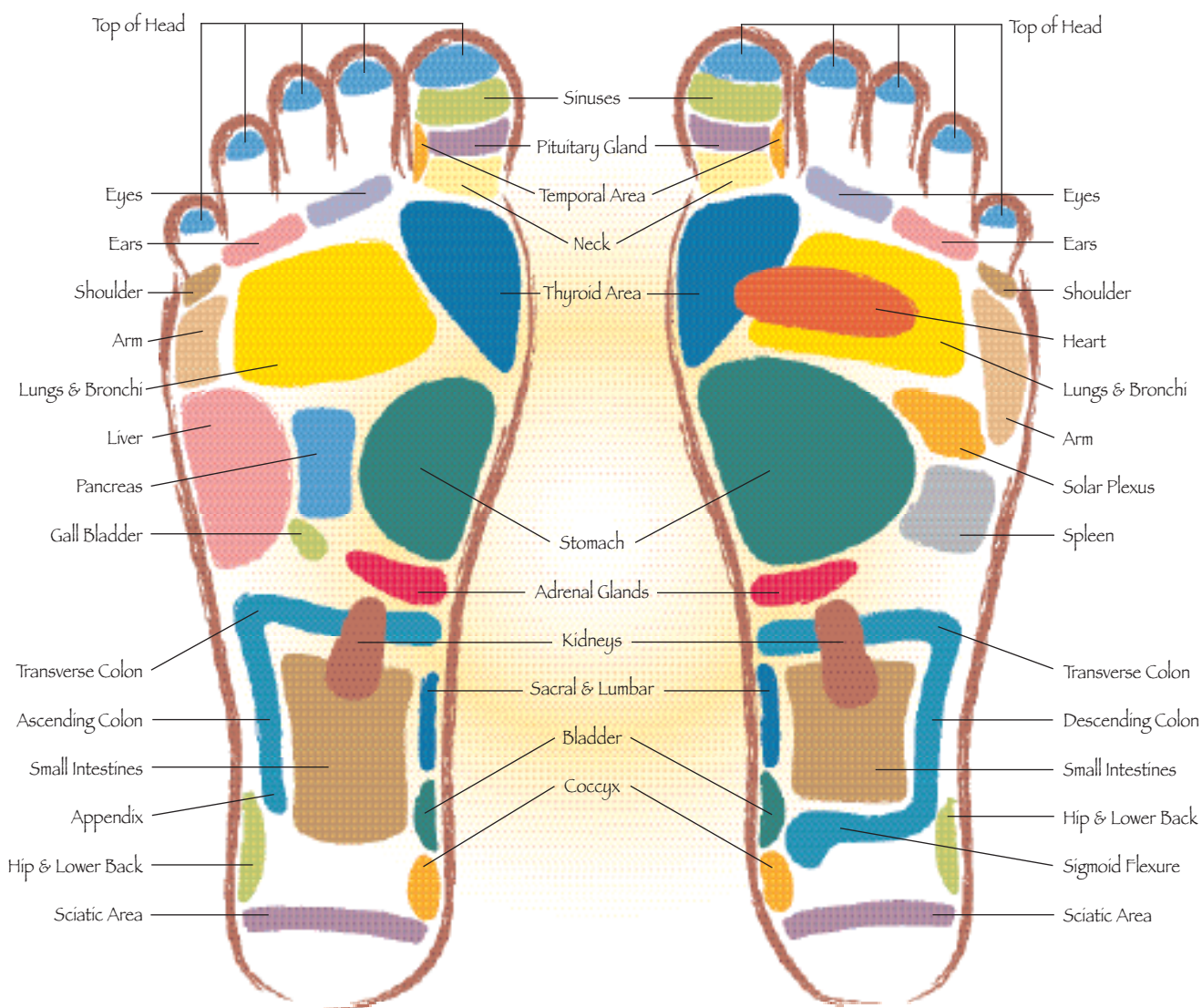
grounded in physiology—reflexology releases endorphins and stimulates nerve circuits, which promote feelings of well-being and relaxation.

Then, there is the "cell-phone theory," which Byers endorses. It's based the idea that reflexology works despite the fact you can't see how. "There are no nerves or 'wires' that connect the foot to specific body areas," he says. "But nonetheless during reflexology, a signal is being sent and received much like a cell phone, even though you don't really know where it comes from."

### Toehold in the past

Despite its mysteries, reflexology has a long record of success and is one of the world's oldest and most documented therapies. Its family tree stretches back more than 4,000 years to ancient Egypt, and the

## Basic Reflexology Chart



practice is found throughout Indian and Chinese history. It wasn't "discovered" in the West until the early 20th century, when American physician William Fitzgerald suggested the foot and hand could be "mapped" to other areas of the body to diagnose or treat medical conditions. He divided the body into 10 zones and labeled the parts of the foot and hand he believed controlled each zone. He proposed that gentle pressure on a certain area could generate relief in the targeted zones, a process he called "zone therapy."

In the 1930s, Eunice Ingham, a nurse and physiotherapist, further developed these maps to include specific reflex points on the feet. Zone therapy soon became known as reflexology, and Ingham took the practice mainstream through her books, teachings, and research. Today, many reflexologists are trained in the Ingham Method™.

### Stomping out pain and stress

Reflexology is often used as a complementary treatment for health conditions related to stress and chronic pain. The scientific evidence is thin, but reflexology has passed initial tests. A 2006 Korean study found the therapy could help to reduce depression and stress responses and increase the immune system response in middle-aged women.

Other research suggests reflexology helps manage postoperative pain and reduce anxiety in cancer patients. Even Byers has his own medical story. "When I was a child, my intense allergies were cured with reflexology," he says.

Byers says he treats everyone from kids and grandparents to injured runners and competitive athletes, and even yogis with mat-related ailments like back and hip pain, weak ankles, and general tightness. "Other clients use reflexology for general stress relief, while others keep monthly appointments as part of general wellness," he says.

### A step toward bliss

Reflexology is perhaps the ultimate non-invasive therapy. You either sit in a comfortable chair or lie on a table with your feet propped and supported by rolled towels. (Only your feet are naked.)

As with other types of bodywork, people respond differently to the treatments, and it is common to experience a range of sensations during a session: deep relaxation, feelings of euphoria, visible contraction of muscles like those in the shoulders and back, tingling, slight pain, and even warmth in the area being worked.

Don't get me wrong—reflexology is full of take-me-away moments. There were many times

## Tale of the toes

by Teri Wingender

Kick off your sandals and tune into what your toes are telling you.

The art of toe reading is based on the premise that the story of your life, including personality characteristics, strengths, weaknesses, challenges, struggles, relationships, and responses to life experiences are recorded and revealed in your toes.

Using those insights, you can then take more empowered steps toward your destiny. "Toe reading is like getting a report card from Spirit," says KC Miller, life coach, founder of the Southwest Institute of Healing Arts in Arizona, and author of *Toe Reading: Are You Walking Your Destined Path?* "You know exactly where you stand in terms of your dharma [Sanskrit word for "right way of living"], especially in a spiritual sense."

In a toe-reading session, you and your reader follow the "metaphorical messages" that toes present in the way they are formed and how they are positioned in relation to each other.

For example, a twisted toe that is turning downward suggests a person who is in doubt or "twisted" about something in their lives. A straight, well-grounded Great Toe indicates confidence and success. And toe tips that point toward heaven often indicate an optimistic attitude.

### Five for five

- The first toe represents the ether element and is your "destiny" toe.
- The second toe is your air toe, also known as the "communication" toe.
- The middle toe is the fire toe—or your "just-do-it-or-not" toe.
- The fourth toe, or water toe, tells relationship stories.
- The little toe is your earth toe. The left toe reveals trust issues, while the right toe indicates prosperity and abundance factors.

Intrigued? You can email a photo of your toes for an online reading: Cost is \$30-\$65, depending on the expertise of the reader. Or learn how to do it yourself using KC Miller's Toe Reading book. For more info, visit [www.ToeReadingOnline.com](http://www.ToeReadingOnline.com).

when I drifted in and out of a meditative state, and after my hour-long treatment, I felt calmer and more relaxed. The greatest surprise: Over the next several days, I noticed my low back didn't rebel as usual at 4pm, and my bothersome neck behaved. After only one session, it was easy to see why reflexology has left such a large footprint in the world. 🙏

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