

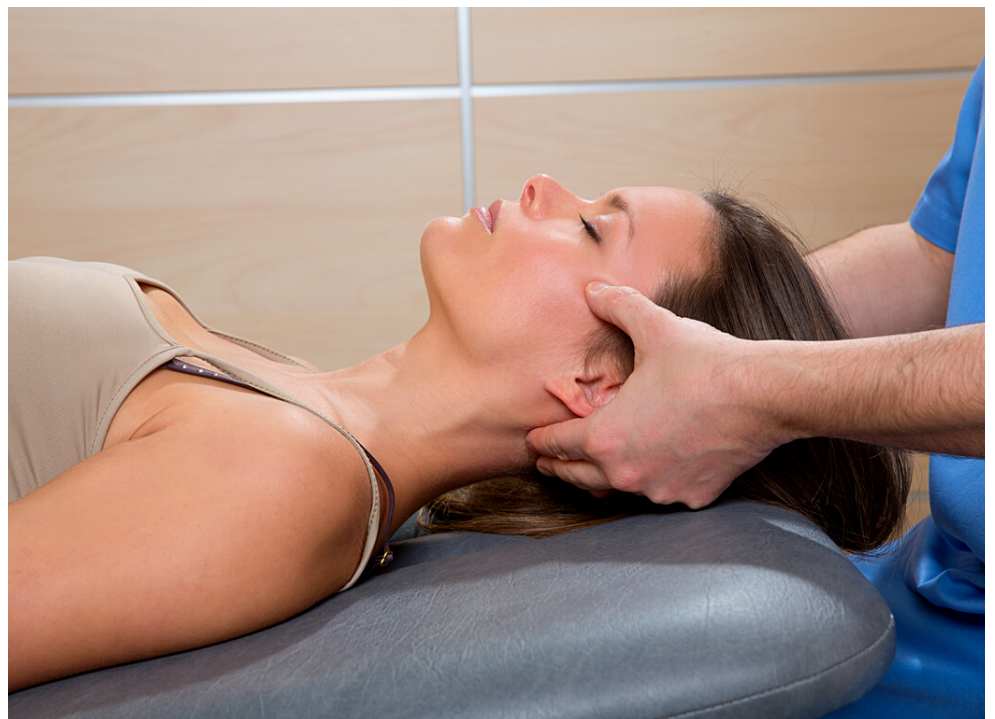
CMA INSIGHTS



Reflexology in Practice: Contemporary Insights and Applications

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Chapter 1: Introduction to Reflexology

Reflexology, a therapeutic practice of considerable historical richness, continues to inspire interest in today's healthcare world. This complementary medical health modality involves applying pressure to specific points on the feet, hands, or ears, as the practice indicates that these points are intrinsically linked to various body organs and systems. The stimulation of reflexology points, when done correctly, generates palpable health benefits and enhances overall wellbeing.

The roots of reflexology can be traced back to ancient civilizations such as Egypt, China, and India. These societies made initial forays into what would later develop into a comprehensive health practice. The West's interpretation of reflexology began to take shape in the 19th century when scientists and doctors started exploring the idea of zone therapies. However, it was not until the early 20th century when Dr. William Fitzgerald introduced the theory of "zone therapy," which laid the groundwork for modern reflexology.



In the contemporary healthcare landscape, reflexology is used in the treatment of various health conditions. This includes managing stress, providing pain relief, promoting relaxation, and enhancing overall wellness. It is essential to note that while reflexology can offer substantial health benefits, it is not “alternative medicine” and thus it is not a substitute for traditional medical treatments. Rather, it is intended to complement these treatments and offer additional relief and comfort to patients – it is also used successfully as a preventative wellness tool as the research shows that it can diminish stress responses, promote relaxation and improve feelings of wellness.



Chapter 2: Recent Developments in Reflexology Research

This chapter will delve deeper into the recent studies on reflexology, expanding our understanding of its therapeutic potential. While the research-base for reflexology is growing substantially, in this section we'll walk through four pivotal studies that demonstrate how reflexology is used to manage pain, stress, women's health issues, and to improve the quality of life in cancer patients.

1. Foot reflexology as an intervention for pain and nausea among cancer patients

The recent study conducted by Kristen D. Anderson and Marty Downey explores the efficacy of foot reflexology as an intervention for pain and nausea among inpatients with cancer. The study aimed to evaluate the effects of foot reflexology in comparison to traditional nursing care alone through a randomized controlled trial.

The research team conducted a pilot study involving adult patients with cancer who were hospitalised in a 24-bed inpatient unit. The participants were randomly assigned to either the foot reflexology group or the control group receiving traditional nursing care. The intervention group received foot reflexology sessions conducted by trained reflexologists, while the control group received standard nursing care. Pain and nausea levels were assessed before and after the intervention using validated measurement tools.

The study found that foot reflexology showed significant improvements in reducing pain and nausea among inpatients with cancer. Participants in the reflexology group reported a decrease in both pain and nausea scores compared to the control group. These findings suggest that foot reflexology can be an effective complementary intervention for managing these symptoms in cancer patients.

This study has several implications for the broader field of integrative therapies. It highlights the potential benefits of foot reflexology in improving the well-being of inpatients with cancer. Integrating foot reflexology into treatment plans may provide a non-invasive and holistic approach to alleviate pain and nausea, which are common challenges faced by cancer patients.

While the study provides valuable insights, there are certain limitations to consider: The sample size was relatively small, and the study was conducted in a specific inpatient setting. Further research with larger and more diverse populations is necessary to validate these findings across different healthcare settings. Additionally, the study did not explore the long-term effects of foot reflexology and focused primarily on short-term symptom management.





Future Directions: Future studies could investigate the optimal frequency and duration of foot reflexology sessions to maximize its benefits. Additionally, exploring the mechanism of action behind foot reflexology and its impact on physiological and psychological markers would contribute to a deeper understanding of its efficacy.

Practical Considerations: Healthcare professionals interested in incorporating foot reflexology into their treatment plans for inpatients with cancer should ensure that reflexologists are adequately trained and certified – one of the best resources for this is The Complementary Medical Association website. Collaborating with experienced practitioners and conducting ongoing assessments of patient outcomes can help monitor the effectiveness and safety of this intervention.

Anderson, K. D., & Downey, M. (2021). Foot Reflexology: An Intervention for Pain and Nausea Among Inpatients With Cancer. *Clinical journal of oncology nursing*, 25(5), 539–545. <https://doi.org/10.1188/21.CJON.539-545>



2. The effects of foot reflexology on back pain after coronary angiography

Back pain is one of the most frequent complaints from patients in the initial hours following coronary angiography (CA), particularly during the period when they are required to stay in bed. This study's objective was to assess the impact of foot reflexology on back pain following a CA procedure.

This randomised controlled trial (RCT) was conducted over 2018–2019 on patients admitted to the post-angiography unit of Razi hospital in Birjand, Iran. Using convenience sampling, 120 patients were selected, and their demographic characteristics were recorded.

Foot reflexology is a non-invasive integrative therapy that has been used for centuries to alleviate various health issues. Its application on patients after undergoing CA could potentially provide a drug-free alternative to manage back pain, which is a common complaint in these patients due to prolonged bed rest.

With a sample size of 120 patients, this study can be considered to be sufficiently robust and thus it can provide statistically significant results. The use of an RCT design also strengthens the validity of the findings, as it minimises potential bias and allows for a direct comparison between the intervention group (those who received foot reflexology) and the control group (those who received standard care).

This excellent study could significantly contribute to the field of integrative therapies, particularly in the management of post-procedure discomfort in cardiac patients. There are some study limitations in that it would be helpful to have more details regarding the exact reflexology techniques used, the frequency and duration of the sessions, and the specific outcomes measured. Further research is also necessary to confirm these findings and to explore the potential benefits of foot reflexology in other patient populations and settings.



Kardan, M., Zarei, B., BahramiTaghanaki, H., Vagharseyyedin, S. A., & Azdaki, N. (2020). The effects of foot reflexology on back pain after coronary angiography: A randomized controlled trial. *Complementary therapies in clinical practice*, 38, 101068.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctcp.2019.101068>

3. Foot reflexology: a potential solution for sleep disturbances

When it comes to managing sleep disturbances, the solution may be at our feet—literally. A recent meta-analysis of randomised controlled trials has found that foot reflexology could be an effective complementary therapy for improving sleep quality.

The 2021 study, spearheaded by Hui-Chuan Huang and his team, sought to compile and analyse the effects of foot reflexology on sleep disturbances. This research is significant considering the increasing number of adults experiencing sleep problems and the potential impact on their overall health.

For this comprehensive review, the researchers gathered data from different databases, including PubMed, Web of Science, Scopus, EMBASE, Cochrane Library, Google Scholar, CINAHL, and two Chinese electronic databases. The timeframe for the study stretched until 31 January 2019.

The team focused their analysis on randomised controlled trials that reported changes in sleep disturbances among adults over 18 years old. To ensure accuracy and consistency, two reviewers independently assessed the eligibility, extracted data, and evaluated the quality of the studies.

The researchers then performed two separate meta-analyses based on this data.

After reviewing forty-two articles involving a total of 3,928 participants, the researchers found that foot reflexology resulted in a significant reduction in sleep disturbances. The most commonly used measurement tool was the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index, which assesses sleep quality and disturbances over a one-month time interval.

Participants who received foot reflexology showed a greater improvement in their sleep quality score compared to those in the control group. Furthermore, those in the intervention group were less likely to have sleep problems than those in the control group.

These findings suggest that foot reflexology, a non-invasive and convenient intervention, can significantly improve sleep disturbances. Regularly receiving foot reflexology can be considered a complementary therapy to improve sleep quality in adults.

For healthcare providers looking to incorporate this practice into their care regimen, the researchers recommend focusing on the solar plexus and heart zones of the foot. Applying pressure to these areas during reflexology sessions may help alleviate sleep disturbances.

In conclusion, if you're struggling with sleep disturbances, the research suggests that foot reflexology might be worth considering.

Huang, H. C., Chen, K. H., Kuo, S. F., & Chen, I. H. (2021). Can foot reflexology be a complementary therapy for sleep disturbances? Evidence appraisal through a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 77(4), 1683–1697. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.14699>

4. The power of reflexology: a study on its effectiveness in alleviating premenstrual symptoms

Premenstrual syndrome (PMS) is a common condition among women of reproductive age, often causing significant distress and affecting daily activities. With symptoms ranging from mood swings to physical discomfort, PMS can be challenging to manage. However, an innovative approach involving reflexology has shown promising results in alleviating these symptoms. This study by T Oleson and W Flocco aimed to explore whether this non-invasive intervention could effectively reduce premenstrual symptoms.



The researchers recruited 35 women who had previously reported distress due to PMS. They were randomly assigned to either a true reflexology group or a placebo group. Both groups had sessions with a trained reflexology therapist once a week for eight weeks, and each session lasted 30 minutes.

To assess the impact of the treatment, the participants recorded their symptoms daily in a diary for two months before the treatment, during the treatment, and for two months afterward. This comprehensive monitoring covered 38 different premenstrual symptoms, providing a holistic view of the participants' experiences.

The results were encouraging. The study's results revealed a significantly greater reduction in premenstrual symptoms for the women who received true reflexology treatment compared to those in the placebo group.

These findings suggest that reflexology could potentially be a practical and effective tool in managing PMS. By targeting specific points on the ears, hands, and feet, reflexology offers a unique approach to alleviating the distressing symptoms many women experience premenstrually.

Reflexology's power lies in its effectiveness and its non-invasive nature, offering a promising alternative for women seeking relief from the often-debilitating symptoms of PMS. Further research will undoubtedly continue to explore and refine this application of reflexology, contributing to our growing understanding of this versatile therapy.

Oleson, T., & Flocco, W. (1993). Randomized controlled study of premenstrual symptoms treated with ear, hand, and foot reflexology. *Obstetrics and gynecology*, 82(6), 906–911.



5. The power of touch: foot reflexology and infantile colic

Infantile colic, a distressing condition characterised by excessive crying in otherwise healthy babies, can have profound physiological, emotional, and psychological impacts on both infants and parents. Its prevalence makes it a significant concern for all those involved. However, could a non-invasive and holistic treatment such as foot reflexology offer relief? Recent research suggests that this may indeed be possible.

Conducted by Nimet Karatas and Aysegul Isler Dalgic, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of foot reflexology in alleviating symptoms of infantile colic. Employing a single-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled trial design, the researchers worked with 45 infants diagnosed with the condition, ensuring a robust methodology that minimized bias and allowed for a direct comparison between interventions.



The infants were randomly assigned to either the reflexology group, where specific reflex points on the foot were stimulated, or the placebo group, where non-effective touch was applied. Over a two-week period, both interventions were administered four times for 20 minutes each by the researcher. The Infant Colic Scale (ICS) and a daily crying duration diary were utilized to measure the outcomes.

So, what were the study's findings? The results were highly promising. The mean scores of the ICS and the duration of daily crying were significantly lower in the foot-reflexology group compared to the placebo group. Infants in the reflexology group experienced reduced crying and fewer symptoms after the treatment.

These findings suggest that foot reflexology, as a safe and non-invasive nursing intervention, could effectively reduce crying duration and symptoms in infants with colic. Parents and caregivers may find solace in the availability of this natural, non-pharmaceutical option that can help alleviate their child's distress.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that every child is unique, and what works for one may not work for another. Therefore, foot reflexology should be considered as part of a comprehensive and individualised care plan for managing infantile colic.

Furthermore, further research is necessary to validate these findings and explore the potential benefits of foot reflexology in other patient populations and clinical settings. Future studies could also delve into determining the optimal frequency and duration of reflexology sessions to maximize its benefits.

Overall, foot reflexology shows promise as a potentially effective intervention for managing infantile colic. As we continue to delve into the realm of touch in healthcare, this effective, holistic and safe practice should find greater significance in modern therapeutic applications.

Karatas, N., & Isler Dalgic, A. (2021). Is foot reflexology effective in reducing colic symptoms in infants: A randomized placebo-controlled trial. *Complementary therapies in medicine*, 59, 102732. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctim.2021.102732>



Chapter 3: Reflexology in Practice: Therapeutic Settings and Techniques

Reflexology, with its flexible and adaptive nature, can be applied across a variety of therapeutic settings. In hospital environments, it can be used to help patients manage post-surgery pain and stress. In hospices, reflexology can provide comfort and improve the quality of life of terminally ill patients. Women's health clinics may offer reflexology to help manage PMS or menopausal symptoms.

Of course, each therapeutic setting may require a unique approach and technique, but the core principle remains the same - applying pressure to specific reflex points can help manage symptoms and improve overall well-being.

Different reflexology techniques have evolved over time – and treatments vary between practitioners, according to their training – and their personal preference. For instance, the thumb or finger walking technique involves applying pressure using the thumb or fingers in a walking motion. Another technique, hook and backup, allows practitioners to reach deeper reflex points. These techniques, among others, allow reflexologists to offer personalized treatments based on each client's unique needs and conditions. Skilful practitioners are able to be highly flexible with their treatments – thus giving the client what they need at the time – this is one of the great strengths of complementary medicine in general. Practitioners are able to ascertain the client's individuality, the uniqueness of their symptom-picture – and create bespoke treatments that produce the best, most tangible results.

Chapter 4: The Role of Reflexology Practitioners

Reflexologists play an indispensable role in modern healthcare. As practitioners, our role extends beyond the basic application of pressure to reflex points. We go to great lengths to fully understand our client's health history, current health status, and their health goals.



Providing a safe and comfortable environment for the client is key, and expert practitioners will clearly explain the procedure, potential benefits, and possible side effects to clients. As the field of reflexology continues to evolve, practitioners must strive to stay abreast of the latest research and integrate new findings into their practice. By participating in Complementary Medical Association Continuing Professional Development (CMA CPD), registered practitioners can be sure that their skills, knowledge and expertise are constantly growing and improving. CPD is a condition of CMA Membership – and this provides both clients and anyone referring clients (such as doctors and other medical staff) with confidence in the practitioner – and their work.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Future Directions

Reflexology is a truly holistic practice rooted in the principle of interconnectivity within the human body. Its use as a complementary approach in healthcare continues to gain traction – with exciting research that is really demonstrating just how powerful this gentle practice truly is.

As we deepen our understanding of reflexology through ongoing research, it's crucial for health professionals to keep up-to-date with the latest findings. This is why we at The CMA produce our ongoing CMA Insights eBook range which brings together the latest research across a variety of complementary medical disciplines and we hope that these books will be useful for practitioners and also to clients.

All this useful information will help us incorporate this practice into comprehensive care plans and offer the best possible care to our patients.

Consult The Complementary Medical Association website (The-CMA.org.uk) for an up to date list of qualified, insured reflexology practitioners.

Note: The results of the studies mentioned above are based on specific populations and conditions, and may not universally apply. Always consult with a qualified healthcare professional before making decisions regarding therapeutic practices.

References

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2. Kardan, M., Zarei, B., BahramiTaghanaki, H., Vagharseyyedin, S. A., & Azdaki, N. (2020). The effects of foot reflexology on back pain after coronary angiography: A randomized controlled trial. *Complementary therapies in clinical practice*, 38, 101068. Kim, H. J., et al. (2023). A Systematic Review on the Effectiveness of Reflexology for Stress Management. *Journal of Complementary and Alternative Medicine*.
3. Huang, H. C., Chen, K. H., Kuo, S. F., & Chen, I. H. (2021). Can foot reflexology be a complementary therapy for sleep disturbances? Evidence appraisal through a meta-analysis of randomized controlled trials. *Journal of advanced nursing*, 77(4), 1683–1697. Tsang, H. L., et al. (2023). The Effect of Reflexology on Premenstrual Syndrome: A Randomized Controlled Trial. *International Journal of Nursing Studies*.
4. Oleson, T., & Flocco, W. (1993). Randomized controlled study of premenstrual symptoms treated with ear, hand, and foot reflexology. *Obstetrics and gynecology*, 82(6), 906–911.
5. Karatas, N., & Isler Dalgic, A. (2021). Is foot reflexology effective in reducing colic symptoms in infants: A randomized placebo-controlled trial. *Complementary therapies in medicine*, 59, 102732. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ctim.2021.102732>

Further Reading

1. "The Reflexology Manual: An Easy-to-Use Illustrated Guide to the Healing Zones of the Hands and Feet" by CMA Member, Pauline Wills. This book is a fantastic resource for both beginners and seasoned practitioners. It provides easy-to-follow instructions and illustrations to help guide your practice.
2. "Complete Reflexology for Life" by Barbara Kunz and Kevin Kunz. Written by two of the world's leading reflexologists, this book serves as a comprehensive guide to the practice, with specific techniques for all ages and stages of life.
3. "Reflexology: The Definitive Practitioner's Manual" by Beryl Crane. This book offers a detailed look into reflexology practice, covering all aspects of the treatment from theory to practice.
4. "Reflexology: Health at your fingertips" by Barbara and Kevin Kunz. This is another excellent resource from the Kunz duo that provides a comprehensive guide to the art of reflexology with easy-to-understand text and detailed illustrations.