At least 78 percent of the adult population will experience a tension headache at some point in their lives; 13 percent of the US population—or 29.5 million Americans—suffer from debilitating migraines.¹ Headaches create, and intensify with, physical and emotional stress, and they can affect sleep, work performance, and appetite. The time-proven art of reflexology, however, is one clinically proven remedy to relieve the nagging pain headaches cause.
Reflexology & Headaches

Opening the Door to Relief

BY PAULA S. STONE
Reflexology maps depict the relationship between the human body and the reflexes in the feet (Image 1) and hands. A reflex is a specific area that when worked, produces a change in the body. The reflex is not on the skin, but in the tissue. Reflexes should also not be confused with acupuncture/acupressure points. A few reflexes are as small as a pinhead, but most are larger. When pressure is applied to often tender points on a foot or hand, change takes place in the areas to which these reflexes correspond throughout the rest of the body.

Both hand and foot reflexology produce a reflexive action in the body. The feet, being more distant from the heart, contain more deposits than the hand, but both protocols are beneficial to the client. Reflexology protocols for muscle tension and headaches stemming from stress are straightforward. The technique facilitates a body-wide relaxation response, evoking a parasympathetic response to ease or relieve head pain. As the neck is the gateway between the head and the body, working head and neck reflexes relieves muscular tension in this area, promoting freer movement of blood, nerve supply, lymph, bioelectrical energy, and other fluids (such as in craniosacral work).

Working a reflex has an impact on all systems of the body affected by that reflex. Since headaches frequently stem from muscular tension, a closer look at muscular system reflexes provides a ready example of how to perform reflexology and think through related client issues. (For this article, our discussion will focus largely on foot reflexology and its protocols.)

The trained reflexologist understands the anatomy of the head, neck, and shoulders, and can locate the reflex of any muscle (or other structure) in the feet or hands. By using reflexology techniques to work the reflexes, the entire head and neck (and all structures therein) are worked quickly, efficiently, and effectively.

Contemporary reflexology is much more than “rubbing crystals” in the reflexes (now an outdated phrase describing what people feel in the tissue). Professionals know that deposits, the more accurate term, reflect an anatomical or functional problem in acute, subacute, or chronic phases. Using biopsies of the feet, Jesus Manzanares, MD, identified the organic tissue characteristics of deposits to be a mixture of various substances, including connective tissue, nerve fibers, and vascular elements. These are palpable for consistency, mobility, size, and sensitivity.

Reflexes for the structures of the head (cranial bones, brain, sinuses, nerves, facial features, and so forth) are located bilaterally in the toes. Deposits and fluid congestion lessen when these areas are worked thoroughly. The professionally trained reflexologist is precise in both identification of these reflexes and the technique utilized to meet session objectives.

KEYS TO HEADACHE RELIEF
When the muscular system (Image 2) is overlaid with reflexology vertical zone lines and horizontal guidelines, it creates an anatomical topographical map of the body. Most muscles of the head and neck are superior to the clavicle. Compare the location of the head and neck muscles with the
The reflexive action of reflexology offers a means to ease discomfort and support the healing process to the injured area without touching it.

Muscular system reflexes (Image 3, page 38). The head reflex is in the distal great toe and all toes (all surfaces). The neck reflex is in the shafts of all toes (all surfaces). Other muscle reflexes for the neck are distal to the clavicle reflexes in the great toe and all toes, located deep in the webbing of each forefoot.

This same process applies to the nervous system and its reflexes to release impingements, the cardiovascular system and its reflexes to improve circulation, and the lymphatic system and its reflexes to support movement and immunity. The beauty of reflexology is that working the great toe, all toes, and the forefoot affects all systems. Isolating and fine-tuning reflexes with skilled touch produces a larger degree of therapeutic change.

**REFLEXOLOGY WHEN MASSAGE IS CONTRAINDIATED**

Reflexology can be performed safely and effectively in situations where massage and movement therapies are contraindicated. For example, immediately following an accident, injury, stroke, or surgery, the tissue in the head and neck may be inflamed, bandaged, painful, or in a state of recovery. The reflexive action of reflexology offers a means to ease discomfort and support the healing process to the injured area without touching it.

The following experiences from my own practice illustrate that reflexology is appropriate when other bodywork is contraindicated, as it works reflexively on the targeted area, relieves pain, and promotes the healing process without applying pressure directly to the site:

* A client in her 70s, who comes regularly for bodywork for discomfort in the head, neck, and upper shoulders, presented with bandages on her neck from recent skin surgery. Working her neck was contraindicated. Reflexology released her muscle tension, and improved mobility and circulation in her head and neck.
A dental procedure I underwent resulted in a severe head injury for myself. Symptoms included jaw dislocation, misalignment of cranial bones, absent or slurred speech (foreign language syndrome), lack of tone on right side of head and face, and debilitating pain throughout the affected areas. Reflexology was absolutely essential in relieving and controlling my head pain during all phases of the healing process.

One client, a nurse practitioner in her 40s, underwent chemotherapy and radiation for cancer. She requested reflexology to reflexively work the upper chest to relieve pain from a recently inserted stent. Within a few minutes of working the shoulder and upper chest reflexes, all her discomfort subsided and she slept peacefully. Her medical doctor and oncologist fully supported her use of reflexology.

The client advocated to her medical team and colleagues how reflexology—more than any other form of bodywork and comfort care—relieved her symptoms of pain, anxiety, and fear.

REFLEXOLOGY PROTOCOLS
Different conditions require different reflexology protocols. As in massage and other soft-tissue and movement therapies, the professional reflexologist understands the effects of the techniques on the client’s body.

The amount of time you spend working in a reflexology session depends on the client. Only a few minutes are required to help ease an acute situation. Typically 30 minutes is a good time frame for children, seniors, or those in frail health or recovering from illness. Most adult reflexology sessions last one hour.

What about pressure and pain? Pain, even a slight twinge, is a warning sign of imbalance. Deposits can lie on nerves, causing a range of responses. Client perceptions include no sensitivity, mild discomfort, and intense pain. The objective is to work the reflex to lessen or remove congestion (excess fluid) or deposits. Be patient. Work slowly and gently with ever-increasing pressure, as if coaxing the deposit or congestion to dissipate. The approach is often highly effective, but check in with the client frequently to ensure tolerance for the work.

BENEFITS OF REFLEXOLOGY
Reflexology is not massage, and massage is not reflexology. However, these two distinct and powerful forms of bodywork are highly synergistic for working with headaches.

With reflexology, therapists can quickly affect areas where massage is contraindicated, including postsurgical and injury sites, as well as areas...
## Head and Neck Reflexology Protocol

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflex</th>
<th>Technique / Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Warm the foot</td>
<td>This could include a variety of passive and active stretching and relaxing techniques; introduce touch and begin assessment. Use many techniques to work the reflexes of the entire foot to promote relaxation. Phalanges (head and neck, endocrine glands); forefoot (chest cavity, digestive system); midfoot (abdominal cavity, digestive system); and heel (pelvic cavity, digestive and reproductive systems).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spinal reflex</td>
<td>Thumb- and fingewalk or roll the entire spine from coccyx to C1 reflexes. Work multidirectionally as needed for thorough work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endocrine glands, diaphragm</td>
<td>Work “helper reflexes” frequently; diaphragm, endocrine system glands, especially hypothalamus, pituitary, adrenals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head, neck, upper shoulders</td>
<td>Rotate each toe to relax the neck and upper shoulder reflexes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neck</td>
<td>Thumb- and fingewalk the entire neck reflex (360 degrees at the base of the great and all toes).  Work deep into the webbing to reflex deeper muscles and structures of the neck. Relaxes muscles in the neck to improve blood and nerve supply. Assists with drainage.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shafts and padding of all toes</td>
<td>Work neck and head reflexes along shafts and padding of each toe on all surfaces (360 degrees), including the nail. Use your thumb (or fingers). Apply gentle pressure between the toes (lateral and medial neck), which is often tender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occipital ridges of all toes</td>
<td>Occipital ridge reflex is located under the entire joint of each distal metatarsal on the plantar surface (medial to lateral). Work gently as deposits form in the joint and the reflex is often tender.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head and neck</td>
<td>Work around all the joints of each toe. Work all toes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>Relaxation techniques to reduce stress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# Headache Reflexology Protocol

## FOR STRESS HEADACHES
(begin with head/neck protocol first)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflex</th>
<th>Technique / Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shoulder, chest</td>
<td>Employ many techniques to relax the muscles and other structures of the back.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diaphragm</td>
<td>A relaxed diaphragm supports deep breathing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endocrine system</td>
<td>Work the entire endocrine system, especially the adrenal gland for stress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## FOR MIGRAINE HEADACHES
(begin with head/neck and stress protocol first)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reflex</th>
<th>Technique / Effect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Digestive system</td>
<td>Work entire digestive system to detox the body.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chest, back</td>
<td>Work entire chest and back reflexes. Work midthoracic muscles (lower trapezius muscle attachment) to relieve muscle tension and ease discomfort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entire body</td>
<td>Releases tension throughout the body promoting restorative sleep.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relaxation</td>
<td>Relaxation techniques to reduce stress.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Inaccessible with massage, such as the endocrine system, for example. Reflexology can work deeply and safely with ease, while also reducing the amount of soft-tissue therapy required to benefit the client. Within minutes, a reflexologist can evaluate, then lessen or release tension in various areas of the body, including those areas that contribute to muscle tension and headaches (i.e., erector spinae, sternocleidomastoid, trapezius, etc.). Ultimately, either on its own or integrated with other therapies, reflexology encourages all systems of the body toward a healthy homeostasis.

## FOOT REFLEXOLOGY — A CASE STUDY
Tight muscles, scar tissue, lack of exercise, tension, and stress all contribute to neck and shoulder issues, which can lead to headaches. This case study illustrates how foot reflexology, combined with client-engaged range of motion, resolved shoulder joint pain in five minutes.

A client presented with soreness and restricted range of motion in the left shoulder joint, which radiated to the neck. First, I worked the shoulder joint reflex on the left foot. The client reported that 80 percent of the pain was gone and mobility increased in the joint by the same amount (determined by the client rotating the left arm).

Next, the client rotated her arm while I worked the fifth phalange on the left foot. First, a finger and thumb stabilized the fifth metatarsophalangeal joint on the left foot. Next, traction and rotation increased mobility in the phalangeal joint and the shoulder joint reflex. This reflexively loosened the lateral neck and shoulder joint. After the tissue warmed, deeper rotations improved mobility in the fifth metatarsal on the left foot. This reflexively worked and promoted mobility in the client's left shoulder joint, lateral shoulder, and left arm.
Reflexology Education and Credentialing

In most states, reflexology is unregulated. No licensure, registration, or certification is required to practice reflexology, call oneself a reflexologist, claim to practice reflexology, or list reflexology as a modality offered. This is changing, however, both legislatively and by consumers seeking out professionally trained reflexologists.

To locate qualified educators and schools of reflexology, visit the American Reflexology Certification Board (www.arcb.net) and the Reflexology Association of America (www.reflexology-usa.org).

Finally, fingerwalking, press-and-flex, and plantar flexion worked the shoulder joint reflex on the left foot, and reduced deposits in the affected reflexes.

All the shoulder pain, including tenderness in the shoulder joint reflex, dissipated completely, and the client had a 100 percent improvement with mobility/range of motion. Using massage, I smoothed the fascia along the deltoids in the upper arms. The entire protocol took five minutes and I was left with a very happy client.

HAND REFLEXOLOGY FOR HEADACHES

Hand reflexology is equally as effective at alleviating headaches as the foot protocol, and is easy to learn. Therapists can even teach clients simple techniques to reduce pain and improve the quality of their lives between professional sessions. Teach clients this handy technique for headaches.

Pressing the adrenal gland reflex on the hand relieves headaches quickly. Locate the adrenal gland reflex on the palm. It lies in the juncture of the first and second metacarpal bones. This area is usually soft and tender (Image 4).

Reflexes extend through the body. Locate the adrenal gland reflex on the dorsum (Image 5); it is very close to a vital energy point. Due to close proximity, the thumb (or finger) presses both of them simultaneously, making the pressure doubly effective.

Use your thumb to apply pressure to the adrenal gland reflex on the palm, while your finger applies pressure to the adrenal gland reflex and vital energy point on the dorsum (Image 6 & 7).

Hold one to two minutes. (Hold long enough to mobilize healing forces, but not to cut off circulation to the cells.) Switch hands. Repeat as needed.

THE ANSWER?

Reflexology can be used either alone or in conjunction with other body therapies to address our clients’ issues with ease, comfort, and care. When massage is contraindicated, reflexology might be the answer to your clients’ needs. m&b


NOTES
