

## Chapter 1

# Acupressure and Reflexology Essentials

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Defining acupressure and reflexology
  - ▶ Tracing the roots of the healing arts
  - ▶ Getting the keys to understanding qi
  - ▶ Finding out how bodywork can help you
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**I**f you're like most people, you know little (if anything) about acupressure and reflexology. You may incorrectly believe that acupressure involves needles. It doesn't — but don't worry, we address that and other misconceptions in the next few chapters. And when thinking about reflexology, you may guess from the name that it involves your reflexes in some way, but that may pretty much be the extent of your insight on the topic.

Or perhaps you *do* have some knowledge of the healing arts. You may know, for example, that a basic tenet of these approaches is the idea that pain can often be traced back to its root, which is often some distance away from the place where the pain is felt. However, you may not know exactly what that is, or how to trace the source of your pain.

Regardless of your knowledge level, or your reason for wanting to discover more, you can definitely benefit from reading about these important approaches to healing. Bodywork is beneficial to almost everyone, and it's often helpful if you know the background behind the techniques.

In this chapter, you explore the roots of reflexology and acupressure. You find out about the fundamental principles involved, including the concept of qi. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, you discover how these approaches to healing can help *you*. No matter what your physical ailment or health concern, you'll probably be pleasantly surprised at the difference even a minimal amount of bodywork can make.

## Acupressure and Reflexology Defined

Before you get too far into the healing routines and practices that we discuss in this book, you need to make sure that you understand exactly what acupressure and reflexology are. They're closely related, and in much of this book we refer to them jointly as a pair of complementary healing arts. But despite their similarities, they do have some differences.

### Acupressure

*Acupressure* is an ancient healing art that entails using an object (generally the hands or arms) to stimulate specific key points on the body with the goal of relieving pain or discomfort. Pain and discomfort are considered to be signs of energy imbalance, which, if left in this state, will become illness and disease.

Acupressure approaches this energy imbalance in a concrete way through the identification of *acupoints*. Acupoints are located on *meridians*, or channels that run throughout the body and connect all parts of the body together. These acupoints are specific sites on the body that often treat pain or discomfort elsewhere. By addressing problems or imbalances at the acupoints, you can balance the flow of energy and thereby reduce or eliminate pain in the affected areas.



Many people confuse acupressure with *acupuncture*. The two are similar and closely related. Both rely on the same fundamental principles, and both use the same points and meridians. The most important difference: acupuncture uses pins — technically, they're hair-thin, sterile needles — and acupressure doesn't. This difference is crucial, because the needle aspect is something that makes many people squeamish or nervous about acupuncture. For those people, acupressure can be an equally effective — yet much less nerve-racking — alternative.

### Eunice Ingham: Reflexology's patron saint

Reflexology first began catching on in the United States in the early 1900s. This was due in large part to a woman named Eunice Ingham. Eunice was a massage therapist who worked in the 1920s for a man named Joe Shelby Riley. Dr. Riley was well known as the creator of the Zone Theory, which is often seen as the precursor to modern-day reflexology. Inspired by Dr. Riley, Eunice expanded on the ideas of zone therapy

while focusing on only one zone, the feet. She published her first book on the topic, called *Stories the Feet Can Tell*, in 1938. Soon Eunice became an in-demand teacher and lecturer who was often asked to share her knowledge of healing therapies. Eventually, she was joined by her nephew, Dwight Byers, who went on to become the founder of the International Institute of Reflexology.

## ***Reflexology***

Reflexology is a system of healing based on balancing energy by stimulating areas in the feet and hands that relate to organs, glands, and parts of the body. Reflexology is similar to acupressure in basic principle, but the two have some differences as well. They both correct imbalances in the energy force by focusing on specific areas of the body where they pinpoint (and treat) that imbalance. Although acupressure involves meridians and acupoints, reflexology relies on pathways called *reflex zones*, which contain *reflex areas* located on the hands and feet. The reflex areas on the hands and feet are essentially holograms of the whole body; therefore, stimulating the hands and feet affects the whole body. By applying pressure to specific reflex points, you adjust the flow of energy and can create a positive response (reduced pain) in a corresponding location elsewhere on the body.

## ***Digging Deeper into Origins and Philosophy***

Many healing arts, including acupressure and reflexology, are based on the beliefs of Chinese energy medicine — which people first practiced more than 5,000 years ago. The ancient Chinese believed that spiritual imbalances caused many illnesses and physical ailments. In order to effectively address the pain, the Chinese believed, you needed to resolve your spiritual imbalance and get your energies and life force in a balanced state. In other words, the Chinese felt that you couldn't properly treat physical pain unless you also addressed your spiritual issues and any imbalances in your energy force. In this section, we explain a bit more about where this belief started as well as a bit about how acupressure and reflexology support that philosophy.

### ***The origins of acupressure and reflexology***

Acupressure and reflexology are no New Age “flash in the pan” trends. In fact, they've actually been around for thousands of years. Their roots are believed to trace back to the ancient people of Asia, who realized the many benefits of strategic touch as part of a healing therapy routine. (In the case of reflexology, some evidence indicates that ancient Egyptians also practiced this type of healing therapy. Treating the body through the feet and hands has also been found in many indigenous healing systems. For example, Native Americans and Australian aborigines are both believed to have healing practices based on foot manipulation.)

## Huang Di Nei Jing

One of the most well-known works related to ancient Chinese medicine is the *Huang Di Nei Jing*, which translates to *The Medical Classic of the Yellow Emperor*. This book, believed to date back to around 200 B.C., details the philosophy

and techniques of acupuncture and other forms of medical treatment. In addition, it also covers other important topics such as astronomy, weather, and military operations.

The ancient people of Asia discovered that pressing specific points on the body can reduce or eliminate pain — often in locations elsewhere on the body. Chinese doctors began focusing on pressure points as a way to treat pain, fight illnesses, and encourage healing after injuries. These sessions, like many others developed by the Chinese of the period, were often used to treat soldiers who had been injured in various military conflicts.

Stone probes, found in Chinese tombs and believed to date back thousands of years, are believed by experts to be the first tools used in acupuncture and acupressure. These stones were called *Bian stones* and were used as tools to apply pressure to acupoints.

Originally, in Asia, many schools of Chinese medicine passed down in family lines. Most of these schools were similar to each other, but they also had lots of little differences — such as the exact function, name, or location of a point, how you use point combinations, and the use of extra points and extra channels of qi. After the Maoist revolution, General Mao combined all the teachings into one, eliminating all the differences, and he called it *Traditional Chinese Medicine*, or TCM. However, current practices still use acupuncture and acupressure techniques that fall outside of TCM and don't necessarily use organ meridians or standard acupoints. Some examples are auricular (ear) acupuncture, which many practitioners use today to treat addictions, and Korean hand acupuncture, which is similar to reflexology. The point? These examples show the vast array of healing techniques available to practitioners who use acupressure and reflexology therapies.

## How and why they work

The foundation of Chinese energy medicine is the belief that a balanced and positive energy force is imperative for good health and emotional well-being. If you move or manipulate this energy to create a more balanced harmonious state, they believed you could effectively treat pain and illness.

As many people now acknowledge, the ancient Chinese healers were on to something. Today, people know that the body is like a big puzzle, with each part interconnected to other parts in many different (and sometimes mysterious) ways. In other words, you may say, “No man’s body part is an island.” A problem that originates with one part of the body inevitably begins to have repercussions on other parts of the body and mind.

## ***Determining Preference: It’s Up to You***

We use acupressure and reflexology together in this book because the effects of one reinforce the effects of the other (see Chapter 3 for more detail). We can’t give you a magic formula that tells you when using acupressure would be more beneficial than using reflexology. Many times it’s a matter of preference — maybe you want to have your whole body touched and like the full-body approach of acupressure. Or maybe you have ticklish feet. Everyone is a little different, and some people respond better to one type of session than the other. Most people, however, enjoy both, and adding both to a session is the ideal because you’re impacting more than one pathway and stimulating more than one type of physiological effect.

You may notice more acceptance of acupressure than reflexology in the mainstream. The reason? Acupressure has been studied more by Western medicine. Although Russians have studied reflexology, it has largely been ignored by medical researchers in the West. This fact is surprising because according to the Pacific Institute of Reflexology, the founder of modern day reflexology, Dr. William Fitzgerald, was a specialist in Boston City Hospital; the Central London Ear, Nose and Throat Hospital in England; and the St. Francis Hospital in Hartford. Unfortunately, until scientific research validates this approach, reflexology won’t reach the same level of acceptance as acupressure.

## ***Fundamental Principles of Acupressure and Reflexology***

Learning basic acupressure and reflexology is much easier when you understand the fundamental principles. Pressure point therapies don’t work with your body as if it’s a machine; they work with your body as an energy system. The energy involved is called *qi* (pronounced *kee*) or *chi* (pronounced *chee*). Health and healing is dependent on the smooth and abundant flow of *qi* throughout the body. Life events can challenge your energy system, disrupting the flow of *qi* and causing imbalance.

Pressure point therapies seek to regain balance. Pressure is applied to specific points to regulate the flow of qi. As qi becomes more balanced, healing processes are stimulated. In this section, we focus on how this works and what forces are involved.

## ***Your body as an energy system: An Eastern approach to healing***

You probably know that models of healing in the West are significantly different from those in the East. In the West, health practitioners see the body as a machine. When the machine has a breakdown, medicine fixes the symptoms and considers that health has been restored. The progression is linear, and goes something like this:

- 1. You get sick.**
- 2. You have symptoms.**
- 3. You stop the symptoms.**
- 4. You feel better.**

Treatment is goal oriented, and the goal is to eliminate symptoms. Here's an example: You go to the doctor with heartburn. Using Western medicine, she gives you an antacid or a drug to block the production of acid. With either treatment your symptoms go away, and her job is done, even though the cause of the problem may not be addressed.

In the East, health practitioners see the body as an energy system. The progression of illness goes something like this:

- 1. Your energy flow is disrupted.**
- 2. You develop symptoms that show you where the energy imbalance is located.**
- 3. Treatment involves shifting the cause of the imbalance.**

Treatment focuses on patterns and cycles of disease. Rather than being goal oriented, Eastern medicine tries to understand what the symptoms mean. Here's an example in this model: You go to the doctor with heartburn, and he assesses the balance and flow of your qi. He determines that the symptoms reveal too much qi in your stomach. He uses pressure point therapies to stimulate the rebalancing of qi and to explore the underlying patterns that created the imbalance. Are you working too much? Do you consistently burn the candle at both ends? Is this overwork an attempt to feel more useful, more worthy of recognition? After you understand your pattern, pressure point therapy can more effectively stimulate qi. Why? Because your mind and emotions are no longer working against you. Now that the pattern is shifted and your qi is balanced, you no longer need the symptoms of heartburn to tell you that you're out of balance.

## Results-based payments for Chinese doctors

In ancient China, every village had a doctor. The doctor's job was to prevent illness and keep everyone in the village healthy. Each month, the doctor was paid for his services, but only if everyone stayed healthy. If anyone got sick, they considered the illness a failure on the doctor's part, and the doctor didn't get paid — now that's preventive medicine! Today it's up to you to practice preventive medicine and stay healthy — the doctor gets paid only when

people get sick. And one of the most effective ways that you can keep yourself healthy (in addition to maintaining healthy nutrition and regular exercise, of course) is to use acupressure and/or reflexology. The tools and techniques in this book can go a long way toward keeping your qi balanced, your body and mind healthy, and your doctor bills low! Co-author Synthia has been practicing them for years, so trust her on this one.



In the Western model, the doctor does the healing. Your body heals, but the doctor does it! In the Eastern view, you already have everything you need to heal yourself. All body processes are geared toward self-healing. Pressure point therapies help shift patterns to remove obstacles to balance. Everything is based on timing. You can't force someone else's energy to change, and you don't know the best timing for change to happen. When giving yourself or someone else a healing session, you're facilitating change. Whether or not that change happens is up to the wisdom of the body. Never try to force results. Daylight can't come until night is over.

## The importance of qi

Unfortunately, we can't give you an exact definition of qi. Trying to define it is like trying to define consciousness or infinity. They aren't easily and intuitively grasped, but they're the foundations of higher principles. Essentially, *qi* is life force, but Chinese texts describe it not only as a force, or energy, but also as a substance. It's a substance that acts through matter, binding molecules together, organizing them into form, and holding form together. At the same time, it's a force that enlivens and activates the form it organizes.

Qi can be described as vital force that sustains all life. Have you heard the expression "dead weight"? That's a body without qi flow. Consider two bodies with all their structures working properly: one is alive and one is dead. The presence or absence of vital life force is the only difference between the two.



Every culture has a concept and name for life force. In China it's chi; in Japan it's qi or ki; in India it's prana; Polynesians call it mana; in Hebrew it's rauch; Islamic cultures call it barraka; and Native American and Australian tribes all have different names as well. In modern times, people have referred to it as biomagnetism, plasma, orgone, L-fields, and factor X.

## The duality of light

The description of qi as both energy and matter is very similar to the duality of light. Isaac Newton described light as a particle and designed experiments that proved it. His contemporary Christian Huygens described light as a wave and designed experiments that proved this, too. It took almost two centuries before

people began to accept that light is both a particle (matter) and a wave (energy), expressing itself differently under different conditions. Understanding the duality of light gave rise to quantum physics. Were the ancient Chinese aware of this duality centuries earlier?

### *Where does qi come from?*

Qi is everywhere. It's present within, between, and around everything that exists. You can think of it as an ocean of qi that you're swimming within (and don't forget, humans are 65 percent water — or in this case, qi!). You may hear people call it universal life force or universal qi. Universal qi changes form when it embodies matter and becomes an individualized life force. You may not know it, but you were born with your own personalized qi that's yours for life. You may be asking yourself right now whether you were born with enough qi to last you your entire life. The truth is that you spend qi every day. Every activity you perform (including thinking!) uses qi. To live a long and healthy life, you need an abundance of qi, so supplementing your original qi is important.

### *Keeping your qi plentiful*

You restock your qi in three different ways. The first way is to obtain qi from the world around you through the air you breathe, through the food you eat, and through natural elements like sunlight. The quality of qi you have to live your life with depends on the quality of what you eat and the environment you're in. Take a minute to consider the quality of qi that's becoming you. Is it reflected in the quality of your health, thoughts, and emotions?

Another way you replenish your qi is to generate it internally. Many systems have been developed to generate internal qi. Yoga, T'ai Chi, and Qi Kung are three moving methods of generating internal energy. Pranic breathing and mediation practices are two of the more sedentary approaches. Your ability to generate internal qi is affected by your thoughts and emotions. Do the thoughts you think give you more energy, or do they drain your energy? You may want to try one of these practices to build your internal energy reserves. Two good books to get you started are *T'ai Chi For Dummies*, by Therese Iknioian, and *Yoga For Dummies*, by Georg Feuerstein and Larry Payne (both published by Wiley).



A third way to supplement qi is through connection to universal qi. All the methods that teach you how to generate internal energy ultimately help you to connect with universal qi. As you become more and more attuned to universal qi, you can begin to fill directly from the source, keeping your own supply vibrant and abundant.

### *What does qi do?*

Talking about what qi does is easier than talking about what qi is. All your cells need to be nourished and sustained with life force. Without life force, your cells would be, well, lifeless! Life force organizes the development of your body, animates you, and motivates you. Without qi, your body degenerates and decomposes; with a deficiency of qi, your life may lack meaning and direction, and your body may lack vibrant health. Qi provides your *body-mind* (a common term illustrating that the body and mind are so interconnected that they really should be treated as one) with information, directing your cells and psyche in fulfilling your own unique design. Not to be overlooked, qi is also a connecting force, connecting your organs, teeth, and tissue to each other; your mind to your body; and your spirit to your path. As it connects you internally, it connects you externally, allowing you to feel attached to the world you live in.



Accepting that qi codes and transmits information is often hard. However, information is always transmitted on energy carrier waves. For example, you access information encoded onto radio waves and microwaves every time you turn on your radio or use your cellphone.

The bottom line? Qi keeps you healthy. When qi is flowing unrestricted through your body, it harmonizes all organs and optimizes body functioning. Have you ever experienced the hum of feeling on top of the world; feeling vibrant, alive, and where you're supposed to be in the universe? This is the feeling of unrestricted, free-flowing, and balanced qi! Using pressure point therapies can help you find this internal balance.

### *Meridians, acupoints, and reflex points as conductors of qi*

Qi is organized in the body in channels called *meridians*. These channels distribute qi to every organ, tissue, and cell in your body. They start as large channels and branch into smaller and smaller channels. You can think of it like arteries becoming arterioles and then capillaries, delivering blood to the cells. Another useful comparison is to think of them like streams or irrigation channels. All supply vital nutrients that are needed for health. Meridians have a higher conductivity than surrounding tissue.

*Acupoints* are points on the meridians that are closest to the surface of the skin (although some are deeper, depending on where they're located on the body). They have an even higher conductivity to energy flow than the rest of the meridian; this energy flow can be measured with micro-electrical voltage meters attached to the skin. Consequently, acupoints are like little whirlpools in a stream. Pressing these whirlpool points helps to regulate the flow of qi.

Reflexology also works with life energy, but it doesn't focus on the meridians as transporters of qi. Pressing the *reflex points* on the feet and hands influences qi reflexively. You push a point on the feet that relates to an organ, and, through a reflexive action, qi flow to the organ is increased or decreased as needed. Although reflexology doesn't focus on meridians, many meridians start or end in the feet, which may be another reason why reflexology can be so effective.

### ***How qi imbalance affects health***

So how do acupressure or reflex points get empty or full? Imbalance can happen in several ways. Energy flow is impacted by injury, overuse, poor nutrition, emotional trauma, pain, being in bad environments, stress, pollution, and toxic overload, to name a few. When imbalance happens, energy accumulates in some areas and is depleted in other areas. Areas of accumulation can become stagnant, like blood pooling in the extremities. Stagnant qi loses its energetic quality and the ability to promote health. Areas of depletion become isolated, losing access to healthy qi flow and losing connection to the rest of the body.

Imbalance in the qi flow impacts your health in many ways. It can open the door to the development of disease, it can give you muscle tension and pain, or it can cause you to feel depression or anxiety. If you've had an imbalance for a long time, you may experience loss of function or a lowered immune system. Maybe you have a small or relatively new imbalance; in that case, you probably feel just a little off or under the weather. Whether you have a big imbalance or a little imbalance, you can support your health by regulating qi flow with pressure point therapies.

### ***Emotions, the mind, and qi***

Where you put your attention influences where your qi flows. Are you thinking all the time about how bad you feel or how tired you are? Guess what? You're instructing your qi to maintain the status quo! And you could be causing more qi to become obstructed or depleted. Instead, try generating some internal qi, and then practice sending it to the areas in your body that need it. How do you do that? By focusing your attention on areas that need help and imagining life force flowing to those areas. If you have life force (and if you're reading this, you should!), it will follow your attention and support your body in achieving better health.

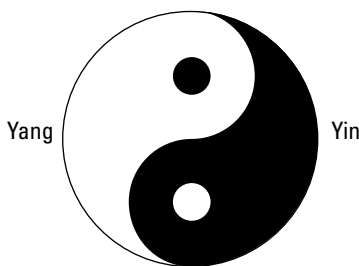
The heart is considered the seat of Shen, or your spirit. When you're in a healthy state, your mind follows the mandates of your spirit, the heart of who you are. Your emotions are your body's way of translating the desires of the heart. Every emotion is linked to a specific organ and has a defined function. Some emotions calm the qi, and some emotions disrupt the qi. All emotions are normal responses to life events and have value. However, if you get stuck in a specific emotional pattern, your qi flow can be disrupted.

Do you find that you always react the same way? Maybe you feel irritable a lot, or you say no to every question, or maybe you say yes to everything even when you don't want to. Maybe everything scares you so that you never want to go places and do things. These situations are examples of being stuck in an old emotional pattern that disturbs your flow of qi. You can read more about emotions — and find some exercises to balance your emotional qi — in Chapters 7 and 8. Every thought you think and every emotion you feel directs your energy.

## ***Yin and yang: Forces of health***

The yin/yang symbol is the fundamental expression of Eastern medicine and philosophy. You've probably already seen this symbol in many different places (if you haven't, check out Figure 1-1). It's a circle divided in two; one side is a swirl of black (yin) and the other side is a swirl of white (yang). The black swirl contains a white dot, and the white swirl contains a black dot, indicating that within each is the seed of the other. But what does this symbol mean, and what does it have to do with pressure point therapy?

**Figure 1-1:**  
The  
yin/yang  
symbol of  
balance and  
harmony.



Yin and yang are the two opposing forces of the universe. Although they're opposites, they're not unrelated; they're different halves of the same whole or different sides of the same coin. You can't have one without the other. You can't have a mountain without a valley, or day without night, and you can't have yin without yang. All things are composed and contain both yin and yang — matter, qi, and even emotions. When something contains more yin than yang, it's considered to be yin, and vice-versa — but never forget that both aspects are still present in all things.

The qualities of yin are considered to be feminine, and the qualities of yang are considered to be masculine (see the nearby sidebar “Qualities of yin and yang” for more info). Yin and yang exist only in relation to each other; nothing is yin or yang all by itself — it can be yin or yang only in relation to something else. For example: If yang is hot and yin is cold, then what's warm — yin or yang? If you're comparing warm to cold, warm is yang. If you're comparing warm to hot, warm is yin. Warm by itself is neither or both.

Health is the dynamic balance between yin and yang forces in the body. Sometimes a person needs more yang energy. Remember the time you had to stay up all night painting a new room? Without activating yang energy, you wouldn't have been able to do it. Sometimes a person needs more yin energy. Remember how long it took to recover from staying up all night? Without nurturing yin energy, you wouldn't have been able to recover! The ability to respond to what's needed in a situation is a keynote of good health.

When you're using pressure point therapy, you determine your healing routine based on whether the points are yin or yang (empty or full). You can determine that a point is yin or yang only in comparison with another point, and we show you how in Chapter 4.

## *The Tao of change*

*Tao* loosely translates as *the way* or *the path*. However, it doesn't mean one way or one path, but the way or the path of the individual. Other translations are *the origin of all things*, *the way of nature*, and *the ultimate reality*. In the yin/yang symbol, the Tao is represented by the circle, symbolizing all that is. The Tao divides itself into two opposite expressions, yin and yang; the dynamic tension between yin and yang creates qi, the energy and substance of all that exists within the Tao.

Take a good look back at Figure 1-1. You may notice that as one swirl gets bigger, the other gets smaller. In fact, when the yin side gets as big as it can, it flips and becomes the yang side, which starts small and gets bigger and bigger until it too flips and becomes the yin side. Yin and yang aren't static. They're constantly moving, turning one into the other; night turns into day, and winter turns into spring. Change is a constant in the universe. Staying the same isn't possible. Change, however, isn't random — it happens when the timing is right; morning only comes when night is finished. This notion is important in the practice of acupressure.

### Qualities of yin and yang

Yin and yang are each associated with specific qualities. For example:

✓ **Qualities of yin:** Cold, dark, night, earth, incubation, moon, rest, contraction, soft, deficient, empty, matter, nurturing, calm

✓ **Qualities of yang:** Hot, light, day, heaven, creation, sun, activity, expansion, hard, excessive, full, energy, defensive, passionate

Health, like the Tao, is always changing. It's a dynamic equilibrium between the forces of yin and yang. If health was a static state, you wouldn't be able to respond to changing situations and environmental demands.

So, all these fundamentals are interesting, but do you need to know them to perform pressure point therapies? Well, the answer is yes and no. You can certainly give pressure point sessions knowing nothing about the dynamic forces you're working with, and you can even be effective. On the other hand, understanding these principles will assist you in giving the most effective sessions possible, assessing the needs of the person you're working with, and minimizing uncomfortable side effects.

## *Personalizing the Benefits and Cautions*

Even if you have a good understanding of the basic principles of acupressure and reflexology (if you don't, just check out the earlier parts of this chapter), you still may be thinking, "That's all very interesting — but how can these techniques help *me* personally?"

That answer varies depending on your specific situation and any health concerns you have. But the general answer is that bodywork can help you in many ways by improving your overall health and well-being and alleviating pain while treating any illnesses or nagging injuries you may have. This, in turn, will surely improve your emotional health and spiritual harmony.

## *What acupressure and reflexology can do for you*

The following list looks at a few specific ways in which acupressure and reflexology may be able to help you:

- ✓ **Immune support:** Bodywork therapies can have a major positive impact on your immune system. The ancient Chinese believed that too much (or too little) energy in a certain meridian or zone could cause undue stress, which would weaken the immune system.

Although specific acupoints are often cited as being specific "immune booster" targets, addressing any energy imbalances you may have will certainly have a positive impact on the state of your immune system.

For maximum benefit to your immune system, use healing arts in conjunction with related techniques, such as meditation and deep breathing. In addition, avoid stress whenever possible.



Also, using bodywork techniques to treat any specific condition you may have — say, a cold or sinus infection — will alleviate the toll on your immune system.

- ✓ **Circulatory stimulation:** One of the basic goals of bodywork techniques is to stimulate the proper circulation of energy. But here's a little secret: blood flow follows energy. So, in essence, by opening pathways for energy, you simultaneously stimulate blood to flow better.

Acupressure and reflexology are excellent ways to stimulate your circulatory system, which is essential to good health. Poor circulation can cause all sorts of undesirable problems, from cramps and swelling (especially in the legs and feet) to more serious conditions like blood clots and strokes.

In addition, poor circulation makes it tougher for your body to heal areas that have suffered a wound or other injury.

- ✓ **Relieving aches, pains, and muscle strains:** Bodywork is perhaps most well-known (and most commonly employed) as an effective way to treat aches and pains. Although any type of massage or muscle stimulation (if done properly) can help alleviate aches and pains, the techniques used in acupressure and reflexology can allow you to pinpoint the root of the pain, thus treating it much more quickly and efficiently.

Plus, by using these techniques correctly, you can often treat pain in several different parts of the body at once (or in rapid succession), thus providing a healing option that can save you considerable time and effort.

- ✓ **Rehabilitation and support for injury recovery:** Bodywork is also commonly used to help the body heal more quickly following an injury. By encouraging the optimal flow of energy to the affected area (and stimulating its corresponding acupoints), you can often speed up the healing and recovery process. In addition, eliminating or reducing pain in that area makes it much easier to perform physical therapy exercises or other routines involved in the rehabilitation process.

- ✓ **Optimal wellness and performance:** It's common knowledge that if you feel better, you perform better. Performing at your best (in sports, work, or anything else) is tough if you're plagued by pain or struggling with injuries.

Improving your energy flow not only helps the specific areas involved, but also boosts your overall well-being and puts you in a more positive frame of mind. This combination allows you to perform at your peak level, while also sustaining proper energy flow necessary for endurance.

- ✓ **Stress reduction:** One of the most important benefits of acupressure and reflexology is stress reduction. Restoring balance to the system reduces muscle tension and promotes relaxation. When you begin to change the patterns of imbalance, stress automatically reduces in your life.

- ✓ **Emotional growth and transformation:** During a pressure point session, you may experience deep relaxation. This type of relaxation allows you to access deeper places within. Here you may find some of the patterns that keep you from being fully satisfied in life. You may find that you're able to see things with a new perspective and that issues that have always bothered you don't anymore.
- ✓ **Making you aware that your body is your temple:** Universal qi is a pretty special substance. You store it in your body, so increasing internal qi sort of makes your body a temple. When this increase of internal qi happens, you may find that you develop a new appreciation for your body, for being alive, and for the special and unique place you have on this planet.

## *What injuries and ailments you need to avoid*



Professionals are trained to work with different pathologies, but because you're just starting, stay away from pressure point therapy on the following conditions:

- ✓ Varicose veins, especially deep or painful conditions
- ✓ Inflammation, a sign of injury — signs are redness, swelling, heat, and dysfunction
- ✓ Severe swelling (edema)
- ✓ Fractures, sprains, strains, or surgery
- ✓ Contagious diseases
- ✓ Infections
- ✓ Contusions, bruises, or bleeding
- ✓ Herniated disk in the spine
- ✓ Severe neck trauma
- ✓ Deep emotional issues or trauma

## *Supplementing and Complementing Acupressure and Reflexology*

As you've probably realized by now, acupressure and reflexology can benefit your health and well-being in many ways. And even if your healing plan consists of these techniques alone, you're bound to see a noticeable improvement in the way you feel.

However, your results will be many times greater if you incorporate these techniques into a comprehensive overall treatment and lifestyle plan. For maximum benefit, you should supplement bodywork with other positive strategies, such as meditation, yoga, stretching, deep breathing, and related exercises. In addition, taking steps to reduce or eliminate stress will make a big difference in your health, both physically and mentally. Naturally, you should also practice other healthy-living habits — in other words, avoid smoking, maintain a healthy diet, exercise regularly, and get sufficient sleep.

All these healthy-living habits play an important role in how you feel and how your body performs. By bringing all these pieces together into one big treatment plan puzzle, you'll be amazed at the positive differences you see in your life.