

## **Pre-Menstrual Syndrome and Reflexology - Christopher Shirley**

PMS or pre-menstrual syndrome has a wide variety of symptoms. In fact, over 100 emotional and physical symptoms have been listed for this umbrella term.

Common emotional symptoms are irritability, mood swings, tension, depression and fatigue, while common physical symptoms include headache, backache, breast tenderness, bloating, fluid retention, arthritis, intestinal upsets and lower abdominal pain. The two common threads of PMS are that the symptoms occur repeatedly some time within 3 to 14 days before the menstrual period, and that the symptoms cause misery.

Over 90 percent of fertile women are affected by PMS at some time in their life - which is a large enough percentage to suggest that the absence of mild symptoms is more "abnormal" than their presence. However, approximately 10 percent of women suffering from this condition have severe symptoms with the result that work and social relationships are seriously disrupted. In truth, PMS brings misery to many women and, to a lot of each woman sufferer's family members and friends. The costs, both social and economic, are high.

Where speculation and research have explored a myriad of explanations of PMS, to-date the cause(s) have not been identified and are not understood.

Because each person diagnosed with PMS has a unique pattern of symptoms, most strategies for treatment are oriented to management of the specific symptoms. Treatment modalities have included herbal remedies, regulated nutrition, prescription drugs, exercise and relaxation techniques.

One natural therapy that is not widely recognized for its effectiveness in alleviating PMS symptoms is reflexology.

A research paper published in the prestigious American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology (1) reported that 38 emotional and physical pre-menstrual symptoms were reduced by an average of 46% for the two months during which the 18 women being studied received weekly reflexology sessions. In addition, the pre-menstrual symptoms continued to be reduced by 41% for two months after the reflexology sessions were ended. The journal concluded that these clinical findings support the use of reflexology for the treatment of PMS.

Reflexologists will be the first to acknowledge that reflexology is not a precise therapy that can be focused to treat a specific condition. Rather reflexology is more a method of therapeutic stress and tension reduction that rejuvenates and revitalizes the whole body - including all of its inner workings. Consequently, research results have often acknowledged that subjects report benefits outside of the specific condition targeted by the study. For example, a study evaluating the effectiveness of reflexology for chronic constipation conducted in Denmark noted that 80% of the subjects reported improved health in a variety of conditions other than their constipation.

On occasion, a person receiving reflexology will experience easing of their lower back pain - when what they were seeking was an improvement in their sleep. It would appear that their body has a different order of priorities for healing itself. Typically, this person's sleep will eventually improve also - if they are patient and continue with their reflexology sessions.

Our bodies have knowledge of how our health has got out of balance, and hence our bodies know the necessary process for its healing. Also, our body is inherently oriented toward optimum health. If you provide your body with the appropriate conditions and resources it will channel its resources to achieve optimum health.

It is therefore up to us to provide for our bodies the necessary resources for attaining optimum health. Reflexology is proving to be a powerful resource for this process if you suffer from PMS, as well as a broad range of other conditions.

Reflexology may be received a number of different ways. A professional reflexologist may be located in most Canadian and American communities. Fees vary and, in general, are reasonable.

Self-help reflexology is also possible. Numerous books are available that describe the techniques and their application. Unfortunately, reflexology self help, like other methods of self-massage, is not nearly as pleasurable as having someone else do it for you. However, results from self-help are often very encouraging.

Another way to have someone do reflexology for you is to sponsor a willing friend to attend a reflexology course to learn the techniques - with your expectations of payment by sessions explicitly clear.

Alternatively you could purchase or borrow from your library an instructional video - which guides a person step by step through giving a complete reflexology session. An advantage of the video is that any person can become an instant reflexologist just by following the instructions as they are demonstrated. If you are inclined, the video will make it possible for you to give reflexology sessions to your friends!

Of course, it is not necessary to be suffering in order to benefit from reflexology. Regular reflexology sessions can be a very pleasant strategy for keeping your level of stress down - and, hence your resistance to disease up.

Reflexology can be blissfully pleasant for those of us who are symptom free.

Whatever path you choose, and whatever your purpose in using reflexology, may you be delighted as you discover the myriad of benefits that reflexology can provide to yourself, your family and friends.

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1. Oleson, Dr. Terry, & Flocco, William. Randomised Controlled Study of Pre-menstrual Symptoms Treated With Ear, Hand and Foot Reflexology. American Journal of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Vol. 82, No.6, December 1993.