

Reflexology may be as effective as painkillers for conditions such as back ache and arthritis

- People felt 40% less pain and were able to stand pain for about 45% longer when they had the treatment
- Researchers say is the first time reflexology has been scientifically tested as a treatment for acute pain

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Reflexology may be as effective as painkillers for common conditions such as osteoarthritis, new research suggests.

Those who had the treatment felt about 40 per cent less pain, and were able to stand pain for about 45 per cent longer when they used the complementary therapy as a method of pain relief.

The researchers, from the University of Portsmouth, said it was the first time this therapy had been scientifically tested as a treatment for acute pain.



Reflexology reduced pain by 40 per cent and people who had the therapy were able to stand pain for 45 per cent longer, researchers found

Dr Carol Samuel, a trained reflexologist who carried out the experimental procedures as part of her PhD studies, said the results suggested reflexology could be used to in conjunction with drugs to treat conditions such as osteoarthritis and back pain.

Participants attended two sessions, in which they were asked to submerge their hand in ice water.

In one of the sessions they were given reflexology before they submerged their hand, and in the other session they believed they were receiving pain relief from a Tens machine, which was not actually switched on.

The researchers found that when the participants received reflexology prior to the session, they were able to keep their hand in the ice water for longer before they felt pain, and that they could also tolerate the pain for a longer period of time.

Dr Samuel said: 'As we predicted, reflexology decreased pain sensations.'

'It is likely that reflexology works in a similar manner to acupuncture by causing the brain to release chemicals that lessen pain signals.'

Dr Ivor Ebenezer, co-author of the study, said: 'We are pleased with these results. Although this is a small study, we hope it will be the basis for future research into the use of reflexology.'

Reflexology involves applying pressure to any body area but is commonly used on either the feet, as it was in this study.



The findings suggest reflexology could help with conditions such as back ache and osteoarthritis

The researchers used a small study of 15 people to determine whether reflexology would be more effective than no pain relief at all.

Dr Ebenezer said: 'Complementary and alternative therapies come in for a lot of criticism, and many have never been properly tested scientifically.'

'One of the common criticisms by the scientific community is that these therapies are often not tested under properly controlled conditions.'

'When a new drug is tested, its effects are compared with a sugar pill.'

'If the drug produces a similar response to the sugar pill, then it is likely the drug's effect on the medical condition is due to a placebo effect.'

'In order to avoid such criticism in this study, we compared the effects of reflexology to a sham Tens control that the participants believed produced pain relief.'

'This is the equivalent of a sugar pill in drug trials.'

Dr Samuel added: 'This is an early study, and more work will need to be done to find out about the way reflexology works.'

'However, it looks like it may be used to complement conventional drug therapy in the treatment of conditions that are associated with pain, such as osteoarthritis, backache and cancers.'

The study has been published in the Journal of Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice.

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