Overview of Self-Applied Massage

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Every ancient culture on our planet has a system of “hands-on” healing. Today, we generally call these practices massage. However there are numerous modalities in which the hands address the body in a therapeutic way. Examples are reflexology, sports massage, trigger point therapy, rolfing, and acupressure to name a few. While there are numerous massage techniques, there are two primary concepts involved in the approach to self-applied massage.

First, one applies pressure and friction to points of the ears, hands, and feet that are reflexes to other parts of the body. These reflex areas are called microsystems. A microsystem is a small, local representation of the whole body. Thousands of years of practice and experience have demonstrated that the ears, hands, and feet are such areas. Each individual part of the human body has an associated reflex on the ear, the hand and on the foot. In the Western world, this is typically called reflexology.

Secondly, one applies kneading, stroking, pressure, friction, tapping and gentle holding to specific areas of pain or dysfunction with the intention of creating relief. In the reflex, acupuncture and acupressure systems, massage affects the distant part of the body. Both of these systems have an effect locally as well as by reflex.

A simple rule applies: the greatest effect of massage will be gained from combining the benefits of treating the specific area of concern along with the reflex areas of the hands, feet, and ears. When self-applied massage is applied with other self-care methods, you will experience a profound renewal of health over time.

Self-Applied Massage of the Hands

The basic technique of self-applied massage for the hands is the same as for the feet. However, the hands are much easier because they are so easy to reach. Without sitting down or having to remove your shoes you can go right to work. You can do this anywhere at any time.
There are certain ancient theories in Chinese medicine that links areas of the hands to particular organs and functions. In one system associated with the ancient classic of philosophy, the *I Ching*, the palm of the hand is depicted as a bowl with the aspects of nature around its interior. Massage your hands all over with firm pressure. Notice areas of tenderness. Return to the tender areas and administer firm pressure for a few minutes. These tender areas are associated with organs and functions that are not operating at their optimum levels.

**Self-Applied Massage of the Ears**

Traditional Asian medicine always has some type of massage stimulation to the ears. When you massage your ears, you will notice that within four to five minutes of vigorous massage your ears get hot. This is caused by the increase of blood flow to that area. The Chinese say, “When the blood is increased to an area, the energy (Qi) is increased to that area as well.” If you have someone else rub your ears, you will notice that your ears are extremely sensitive because the ears are heavily innervated.

The combination of the presence of the nerve, the effect of the pressure and the heightened circulation causes stimulation to the reflexes of the microsystem of the ear. Through this reflex microsystem, all parts of the body can be influenced through pressure massage to the ear. Massage of the ear is similar to massage of the foot and hand. Begin with moderate pressure and work over the entire ear on both sides. Notice areas of discomfort. Return and work the uncomfortable areas vigorously.

**Self-Applied Massage of the Feet**

The toes and ball of the foot are reflex to the upper part of the body. The central area of the arch is reflex to the torso. The heel is related to the parts of the body below the waist. Simply find the sore points and work on them.

First, do pressure massage over the entire foot. Usually the bottom of the foot is the primary focus; however, the top of the foot and the ankle area are rich with reflexes as well. As you are massaging the whole foot, note areas of particular tenderness. These are the reflexes that need it the most. Stimulating them and working out the soreness will help the organs, glands and tissues that are
associated through the reflex mechanism to function in a more effectively. Generally, use your thumbs to apply the pressure.

It will take a while to build up your thumbs. Alternate the techniques for pressure application by using bunched, extended fingers, the knuckles, the heel of the hand or a gripping motion where the whole hand provides the force for pressing inward with the four fingers.

Start with light pressure and work up to substantial pressure. Imagine the pressure necessary to impress a new tennis ball or the force necessary to pick up a brick between your thumb and index finger. These are images to give you guidance on the amount of pressure necessary. If it hurts, back off. Notice that over a few days generally the amount of soreness will change.