

Starting off on the right foot

Ancient art of reflexology soothes pressure points on body to promote healing

BY SANDY THORN CLARK

Nancy Cole has a touchy-feely job. She's a reflexologist.

Cole, owner of Third Coast Reflexology, practices the non-invasive healing approach dating back 5,000 years ago in China and 4,000 years ago in Egypt. She shares a suite with Health Benefits Pain Management Services on the sixth floor of the medical building at 2800 N. Sheridan.

Hopeful that her office's dim lighting, relaxing music, lit candle that hints of incense, and framed art prints aren't "too new-agey," the 43-year-old Cole explains what reflexology is.

Based on the concept that every part of the body is aligned along pathways ending in specific points on the feet and hands, reflexology stimulates the body's innate capacity to heal itself from imbalances caused by illness, surgery and other stressors, unblocking vital energy pathways to restore body function.

By applying precise and steady pressure to reflex areas on the feet and hands, Cole — trained and certified by the International Institute of Reflexology in St. Petersburg, Fla., in 2003 — bolsters the body's ability to heal itself.

"Reflexology is much less about feet and hands than the whole body," says Cole, 43. Its primary benefits are to relieve stress and tension, restore balance, revitalize energy, promote a sense of well-being and clear congested pathways.

Her clients, ranging in age from 4 to 92, primarily are seeking stress relief, relaxation and pain management during their individual 50-minute sessions (\$75).

Others see her for specific conditions including arthritis pain and mobility, nausea and fatigue associated with cancer treatment, emotional imbalance (including anxiety/depression), chronic headaches, insomnia, grief, sinus pressure and allergies,



Nancy Cole demonstrates how she practices reflexology, which dates back to 5,000 years ago. | RICHARD A. CHAPMAN-SUN-TIMES

women's reproductive health (including infertility and prenatal care), digestive/constipation/bowel problems, plantar fasciitis, neuromuscular conditions such as MS and Lou Gehrig's, and musculoskeletal issues.

Most clients return twice each month, and some limit a session to 30 minutes.

Cole, who first became fascinated with reflexology 20 years ago but initially pursued careers as a pre-school teacher and journalist, initially takes each client's medical and life history.

Next, she examines her client's feet, noting their temperature, color and general appearance.

After applying powder to her client's toes and soles, the reflexologist begins exerting thumb pressure of varying strengths over the pressure points of the feet. Cole concentrates on tender areas — areas she labels "the eye of the storm" that cause a client to flinch, stiffen or recoil — because those areas are the most telling in terms of imbalance.

When her pressure prompts client discomfort, she immediately becomes gentler. "Client comfort is important to me," she reasons.

During reflexology, the client's body experiences a

process of detoxification which, the Chicago native cautions, may later manifest itself as the increased need to urinate or diarrhea (she amusingly refers to them as "the pee and poop factors"), aching joints, or cold- or flu-like symptoms. These temporary side effects should be regarded as good signs, Cole insists, because they are evidence the body is ridding itself of toxins and impurities — "and that's why you've come to see me in the first place."

Following reflexology, clients — advised by Cole to drink lots of water "because water is the key to releasing toxins" — generally feel a "burst of energy" after a night's sleep.

The Lincoln Square resident loves film, the theater and the Cubs. Her brown eyes still glisten with tears when she speaks of the sadness of losing Ted Lilly and Derrek Lee, her favorite Cubs, to trades this past season ("we fans never got to adequately say goodbye").

And, yes, Cole's No. 34 tattoo is for Walter Payton, her all-time favorite athlete.

"I'm a pretty passionate person," the reflexologist concludes.

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