



# traditional Thai massage and reflexology

by Christine Townley

Traditional Thai Massage, also known as Thai Yoga Massage, consists of a rich, diverse blend of ancient Asian techniques including reflexology, acupressure and Yoga.



Reflexology is based on the principle that the internal organs and structures of the body are reflected on the feet and hands in miniature. Thai Massage has similar techniques to stimulate specific areas on the feet and hands which are rich in nerve endings, to encourage healing in the corresponding area of the body.

Buddhist influences are a core component of Thai Massage. The practitioner's healing energies and touch with loving kindness, known as 'metta' in Buddhism, are more powerful and therapeutic than any implement. The feet are usually more sensitive and receptive to touch than the hands because they are normally covered and protected and so working them can have greater benefits.

#### sen energy lines

The energy lines throughout the body are known as 'sen lines' in Thai massage. These are similar to the Yoga system of 'nadis' and Chinese meridians. If the energy flow is blocked, this can prevent the body from functioning effectively leading to illness, stress or disease. Thumb pressure and palm pressure is used along these energy channels/sen lines to enhance the energy flow, encouraging the body to heal itself and balance the systems.



Palming using both hands



Ankle stretching



Elbow Pressing, stretching the calf and hamstring



Thumb Presses



Thumb Circles



Palming using the practitioner's feet

There are 10 major sen lines in the body, with 72,000 in total. One is called 'Sen Kalathari'. It begins at the navel and branches into 4, with 2 on each side of the body. Two lines proceed from the navel to the chest (right and left sides), to the shoulder and then down the inside of the arms to the hands and fingers. The other 2 proceed from the abdomen to the groin and down inside the legs to the feet and toes. Energy lines on the sole of the feet are known as energy zones in reflexology and run the same pathway on the hands and feet as Sen Kalathari.

### Thai techniques for the feet

Some time may be spent working the feet in Thai Massage, especially if the client is stressed. Thai massage always begins with the feet, helping to soothe the nervous system, calming and relaxing the client's energy in preparation for deeper work. The massage works up through the body, moving energy and channeling it upwards through the legs, hips and upper body.

Thai foot massage techniques are a modified version of reflexology, being based on the same principles. However, in reflexology the therapist will apply techniques with their hands while, in Thai massage, the client lies on a futon mattress and the practitioner applies an array of techniques using their hands, knuckles, feet, knees and sometimes elbows. Some techniques are applied to one foot at a time and others with both feet together, likewise with the hands. Another important difference is that in Thai massage, the thumb joint is kept straight.

The following are just some of the techniques used: palming, thumb presses, thumb circles, finger circles, finger pressing, joint mobilisation, ankle stretching, foot twists to release spinal tension, forearm rolling to work the the hamstring and calf muscles, elbow pressing to stretch the calf and hamstring, and a Yoga stretch for the back which stimulates the kidney area on the feet.

A very traditional technique of Thai massage is toe cracking which involves pulling the toe below the joint. This can make quite a loud popping noise, releasing gases from around the joints. It is a good idea to ask your client first if they wish to receive this and it should be applied gently. When the client lies on their abdomen, the practitioner may apply palming techniques with their feet or knuckles on the soles of the feet. In Yoga stretching, the elbow presses and forearm roll of the feet are performed from a standing position, with the client's leg upright. These Yoga postures which stimulate areas of the feet are another unique feature.

A Thai Massage practitioner intuitively combines and works through the whole body varying the techniques from acupressure, reflexology, soothing massage and Yoga stretches, depending on the client's needs and ability. It is carried out in a slow, gentle rhythmic pace while always paying close attention to facial and body reactions. The abundance and combination of these ancient and traditional techniques are blended to create a wonderful and powerful healing therapy.

### some benefits of Thai foot massage

- 1 Stimulates the internal organs
- 2 Improves circulation and energy flow
- 3 Calms the mind and soothes the nervous system, inducing deep relaxation
- 4 Improves joint mobility and flexibility
- 5 Stimulates lymphatic drainage and immune system.
- 6 Powerful relief for stress
- 7 Improves sleep patterns

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