



UNDER PRESSURE

A SERIOUS FOOT MASSAGE IS BETTER FOR YOUR WHOLE BODY THAN YOU THINK

by Ari Bendersky

What is it about our culture that doesn't allow us to relax? We have constant stimulation—PDAs and cell phones buzzing, kids screaming, TVs blaring, cars honking—that we can't just kick back and turn it all off. If we learned to take cues from the Japanese—who work just as hard as we do, arguably even harder, but understand the importance of daily relaxation and massage—we, as Americans, might be a much more pleasant group of people.

Eric Huffman, aka the Healing Samurai, is a Japanese foot reflex specialist and one of the few people in the United States practicing this form of what the Japanese simply refer to as foot massage. He spent about eight months living and studying in Japan to try and bring even a small piece of that culture back home to help people streamline their lives and chill out.

"It's not part of our culture to have a daily massage," he says. "In Japan, every night when people come home from work, everyone massages each other, they take hot baths, they push pressure points on the hands and feet. Japanese people live 10 years longer than us. Their lifestyle—they work very hard but they take care of themselves."

Huffman, who is also a trained yoga instructor and meditates daily, says Japanese foot reflex aids you in many ways. By pressing and massaging various points on our feet, the therapy helps engage the body's parasympathetic system, kicking it into natural repair mode. Japanese foot reflex is based on traditional Chinese medicine; the practice works with Chi meridians—a natural energy force that links our body together—to help stimulate energy flow.

Foot reflex shifts energy into rejuvenating and nourishing the cells; helps relieve tension in our muscles, nerves and major organs; and it can help the body naturally detoxify by aiding blood flow.

While it's not a replacement for medical treatment for serious illness like cancer, leukemia or HIV, Huffman says he has had patients who have benefited from foot reflex therapy. For instance, one client was undergoing chemotherapy and was able to better

digest and keep down food after partaking in sessions. Because the digestive system and stomach were able to relax, she was less nauseous and felt stronger.

"[Foot reflex] is simply a system to help your body recover more naturally and quickly, regardless of your physical health condition," Huffman says. "A lot of our problems are due to mental or environmental stress. When we give our body a chance to slow down, it's amazing what we can do."

I gave my body a chance a few weeks ago and spent an hour with Huffman at his North Side space. Lying back on the table, feet resting comfortably just at the end, Huffman began by cleansing and wrapping my feet with hot towels while soothing music aided the relaxation process. Working on one foot at a time, Huffman massaged and triggered various points on the soles and sides of my feet, sending signals throughout my body.

Huffman explained that while he may work on one spot, it helps the entire body because we're connected through a series of nerves that work like a spider web: If you pull or tug on one end, it moves the entire system. At the conclusion of my session he said that when he triggered certain points tied to my lower back and left shoulder, those points on my feet flared red (I had recently injured my shoulder in a snowboarding mishap in Colorado, and I always have knots in my back), and when I told him I noticed my stomach gurgle, he confirmed he just worked on my stomach point.

Sure, some people might be skeptical and say those things are just coincidence. But there's a reason entire cultures have relied on holistic therapies like foot reflexology to extend their lives for centuries—and it isn't just because they know how to pamper themselves. Or is it?

Eric Huffman's treatment room is located at 4502 N. Maplewood #2 (773/895-4415); healingsamurai.net