

THAI FOOT MASSAGE YOUR FEET HOLD THE SECRET CURE TO A WHOLE RANGE OF BODILY COMPLAINTS, FINDS **VICKI-MARIE COSSAR**

Sensual heeling

Most people's feet get a raw deal these days. Crammed into high-heeled, pointy-toed shoes or sweaty trainers, they are a part of our bodies least likely to be pampered.

But, in the right hands, a foot massage is not only relaxing and pleasant, it can have a range of health benefits, too.

And it's not just a fad – Buddhist monks have been practising the art for more than 2,500 years.

An authentic Thai foot massage – there are some very inauthentic ones around – is a massage of the lower legs and feet involving stretching and the use of a stick to stimulate reflex points.

Simon Gall, who founded The London School Of Thai Massage, has more than 15 years experience in holistic health and fitness. He is also a trained yoga teacher, pilates instructor, nutritional therapist and sports massage therapist – a true professional.

Passion for tootsies

When Gall talks about the courses he runs, it's clear he's passionate about what he does: 'When I discovered Thai massage, I thought I was the first to have discovered it, like Columbus discovering America.'

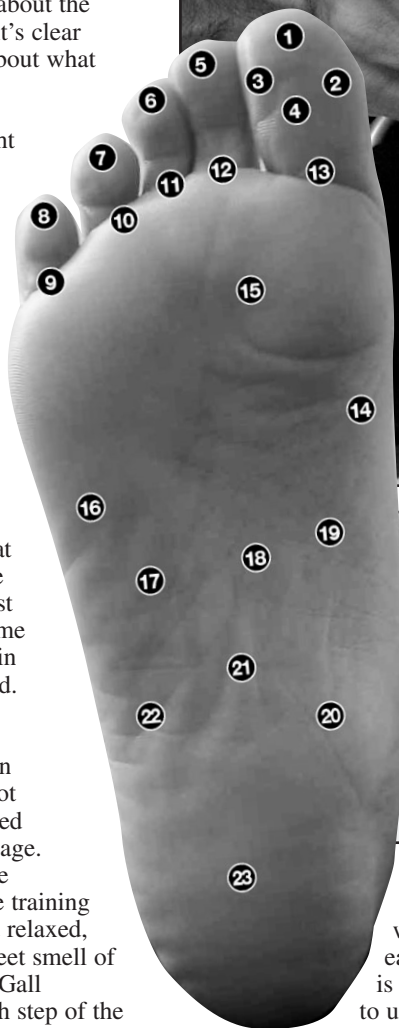
Gall began training at the Institute Of Thai Massage in Northern Thailand and has since qualified as an advanced practitioner at Wat Po, an impressive Bangkok Buddhist temple in and home of Thai massage in Southern Thailand. His school offers practitioner-level training courses in Thai massage, foot massage and seated acupressure massage.

When I visit, the atmosphere in the training room is calm and relaxed, helped by the sweet smell of burning incense. Gall demonstrates each step of the massage. We are also given a booklet with pictures and clear explanations before being paired up to practise on each other.

Each section of the massage is broken down into parts. When it comes to using an authentic Thai stick to stimulate the pressure points and energy lines, Gall takes



Toe the line: Thai foot massage tutor Simon Gall at work



Key to your soothing souls

- | | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| 1 Frontal sinuses | 13 Throat/neck | 19 Small intestines (duodenum) |
| 2 Nose | 14 Stomach | 20 Urinary bladder |
| 3 Temple | 15 Thyroid and lungs | 21 Small intestines |
| 4 Head | 16 Liver (R) and spleen (L) | 22 Descending colon (L) and ascending colon (R) |
| 5, 6, 7, 8 Forehead and sinuses | 17 Gall bladder (R) and spleen (L) | 23 Sex organs |
| 9, 10, 11, 12 Eyes | 18 Kidneys | |

time to show us where each point is and how to use the stick effectively. By working the energy lines, the energy flow throughout the body is balanced. Internal organs are stimulated via the various reflex points on the soles of the feet – for example, the ball of the foot for the thyroid and lungs, the arch for the small intestines and the

heel for sex organs. As my partner applies pressure to my foot, I am amazed how effective stimulating the pressure points is.

Feelings of relaxation wash over me and, as I look around, some of my fellow students have fallen asleep while their partners are concentrating hard on their technique.

Most of the students have some kind of health or beauty experience, but some are there purely out of interest.

The course allows students

time to practise and learn the sequences. Complete beginners can work towards a career in bodywork, while enthusiasts can learn how to practise a powerful healing art on friends and family while practicing therapists can add new treatments to their repertoire.

■ Courses are held at venues around the country throughout the year. Tel: 020 8460 1213, e-mail info@lstm.co.uk or visit www.lstm.co.uk for more information and details of courses at The Therapy Centre.

ORIGINS

2,500-year-old fad

Traditional Thai Medical Massage originated in India during Buddha's lifetime more than 2,500 years ago.

This early system of healing had four components – diet, spiritual practices, massage and herbal remedies – and has remained pretty much intact through the centuries.

Now taught by Buddhist monks in the temples of Thailand, it's an integral part of traditional Thai massage, with elements of Shiatsu, reflexology, Chinese massage and yoga.

Thai foot massage is designed to stimulate the internal organs to give the receiver a holistic treatment. Benefits are said to include improving the circulation in legs and hands, stimulating



lymphatic drainage, removing toxins, boosting the immune system, reducing stiffness and improving flexibility. Other claimed benefits include detoxification of the immune system, accelerated physical healing, stress relief, improved sleep and stimulation of the mind.



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