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Our feet are the foundation for our mind and body.*

Words / Judy Chapman

I'm sitting here with two feet plunged into an Indian copper bowl filled with warm water and floating flowers. Beside me is a pot of steaming herbal tea. The scent of aromatherapy fills the air and it occurs to me that before I've even received the soothing massage, I'm already feeling deeply relaxed.

Such is the raison d'être of the foot ritual offered at spas around the world. Whether it's a simple soak, a leisurely wash or a scrub and massage, the experience of having your feet attended to before treatment is certain to bring you down to earth. Not to mention help you feel incredibly soothed in mind and body.

FOOT TO HEAD

According to the ancient masters, our feet are a reflection of our inner body so when our feet are relaxed, so are we. Through nurturing the “souls” of our feet, we keep our energy grounded. Our feet are the foundation for our mind and body. Just think how incredibly mind-soothing a foot massage can be. Everything in our body is connected.

Step into the Orient and you'll discover that cared-for feet are symbolic of respect and wellbeing. Eastern cultures have long valued the importance of taking care of their feet. In Thailand, for example, people will wash their feet before entering a temple and in Bali, priests are known to end their day with a ceremonial foot

wash. The Japanese always remove their shoes before entering their own abode or a ryokan.

Ancient medicine systems, too, have long promoted the health values of having clean feet. In traditional folk medicine, foot care treatments involving water, massage, herbs and oils were taken to help combat cracked heels, corns, dry skin, foot odour and sores. Ayurvedic physicians have written that our feet are a map to our inner body. According to Ayurveda, dry and chapped-looking feet can reflect a vata condition, while hot and sweaty feet may reflect a pitta imbalance and fluid retention possibly indicates a kapha condition.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, the principles of reflexology therapy reveal that the condition of our feet mirrors our inner body. Through self-massaging our feet on a regular basis, we can take care of our internal organs. Also, our feet are considered nature's own detoxifying system, where we perspire and get rid of wastes, so it makes sense to soak them regularly with cleansing oils and purified water.

RELAXATION AND HEALING

Father Sebastian Kneipp (1821-1997), a Bavarian monk, is well known for his “water cures” that led to the Kneipp hydrotherapy footbath we often find in spas today. This system of alternating and contrasting temperature baths is possibly one of the best-known curative

foot treatments for stimulating circulation through the body. A cold footbath, for example, is recommended for improving circulation, lowering blood pressure and reducing sleeplessness and sweaty feet. A warmer footbath is beneficial for deepening relaxation and can help relieve pain and aches in the feet area. A little warmer, and you can help soothe stiffness caused by arthritis, joint stiffness, muscle spasms and inflammation. Hydrotherapy, practised in many cultures around the world, including ancient Rome, China and Japan, continues today.

A simple foot soak can do wonders for your whole being and extraordinary experiences can be created for your feet and for you. Beautiful ingredients for a foot treatment include Epsom salts and sea salt, clay, oatmeal, shredded coconut flesh, pumice stone and refreshing oils such as peppermint and lime or relaxing choices such as lavender and sandalwood. A bit of colour therapy can be added by scattering fresh flowers on the water's surface, or placing flat, round stones at the bottom of the bowl can provide a type of reflexology massage.

Ultimately, the act of sinking your feet into a bowl of warm water is bound to bring you pleasure. After all, pleasure also needs to be part of the cure. Creating space and time to nurture your feet is an experience as beautiful as the hundreds of blossoms I'm bathing in.

Photography: Getty Images

