

Resources

Hand and Foot Therapy

by Anne C. Willis

In 2005, I traveled to Thailand for an international wellness summit and the opportunity to train with traditional healers. Thai foot and hand therapies are rich in history and they reflect the engaging customs of the region. Common courtesy should be used in any society but in Thailand it plays a key role and is a refreshing shift from the animated protocols of the western spa. Thai people live more in the moment with infectious

enjoyment and services given with great respect and hospitality. This is reflected in the ritual of foot bathing that is customary before every treatment. The foot is probably the most abused part of the body, but not only that, it seems to have a direct connection to every other part of the body. A good Thai foot bath and massage not only makes your feet feel wonderful, it can promote healing and relaxation in many other parts of the body as well.





In the ancient Orient, this was discovered rather early, and foot treatments were used as a method of healing both the mind and the body. As a holistic treatment, these therapies were a wonderful modality in relieving stress, promoting restful sleep, increasing circulation, and even helping to promote a better immune system. In the mental sense, it could increase alertness and enhance creativity.

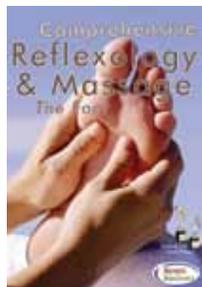
Upon entering a spa in the Orient the first thing you are asked to do is to remove your shoes. The feet are regarded as the lowest part of the body and therefore unclean. They carry patterns of life best left at the door. Shoes are removed when entering a private Thai home as a sign of respect and this custom is followed through at the spa. Once changed from street cloths to a light linen wrap you are escorted to a foot pagoda where a ceramic bowl filled with herbal tea, salts, and fresh picked orchid petals await your tired feet. You are presented a cup of herbal infusion, which immediately slips you to your inner universe calming and releasing the tension from your day. What is most unique about this presentation is the therapist who administers the foot-bath. As you slip into a world of calm the therapist gently kneels before you gently holding your feet before submerging them in the warm herbal bath. The handling of the feet is done with great respect and choreographed with genuine love. The sentiment of the activity, the humility, the servant's heart, the willingness to per-



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form this ritual is somehow uncomfortable for those on the receiving end. Most of us are givers and struggle with the concept of someone treating us, especially the feet. But the ritual dates back centuries and is a way of demonstrating service to one another with genuine respect.

History or Legend

The ritual of foot and arm bathing dates back thousands of years and is historically validated by many regions in the world. Modern hydrotherapy originated in 19th century Europe with the development of spas for "water cure" ailments, ranging from anxiety to phenomena to back pain. Hydrotherapy is broadly defined as the external application of water in any form or temperature (hot, cold, steam, liquid, ice) for healing purposes. Father Sebastian Kneipp, a 19th century Bavarian monk, spurred a movement to recognize the benefits of hydrotherapy. Benedict Lust adopted Kneipp's methods and later immigrated to the U.S. from Germany in 1896, and founded an American school of naturopathic medicine. Lust claimed to have cured himself of tuberculosis with Kneipp's methods, and hydrotherapy was included as a component of naturopathic medicine.

Throughout history feet have represented mobility, security and grounding. The hand denotes a pledge of faith, sincerity and justice – in addition to it being symbolic of support and strength.

How Treatments Were Traditionally Used

A heated muslin parcel of aromatic, medicinal herbs and spices is a truly heavenly health treatment. It has remained unchanged since Thailand's (then Siam) Ayutthaya period of the 14th to 18th century. Fragrant hot herb packs were administered to weary soldiers upon their return home to relieve tired and weary bodies and minds.

Hand and Arm Bath

For an herbal hand and arm bath, the hand and arm is placed in a basin of herbal infused water with the water level reaching just above the elbow. Allowing the hand and arm to soak for five to 10 minutes reduces swelling, softens dead skin cells, and circulates stagnate energy.

1. Begin treatment by dry brushing skin to improve circulations and remove dead skin cuticle before submerging the arm in a bath.
2. Soak hands and arms in herbal infusion and/or salts to cleanse, detoxify the skin, and treat skin condition(s).
 - Note 1: If you do not have a vessel to submerge arm, just apply the hydrotherapy to the hand.
 - Note 2: If you save the muslin parcel used to make herbal infusion you can use parcel to remove mask at the end of the treatment and for massage.



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3. Apply a mask to hand and arms from the knuckles to elbow.
4. Wrap hand and arm with herbal infusion wrap. Massage client's shoulder and scalp, while mask sets for 10 minutes.
5. To remove mask rinse arm and hand with tea water (The saved muslin parcel can also be used to remove mask).
6. Massage with therapeutic oil.

5. To remove mask rinse leg with tea water (The saved muslin parcel can also be used to remove mask).
6. Massage with therapeutic oil.

Footbath

For an herbal footbath, the feet are placed in a basin of herbal infused water with the water level reaching just above the ankle. Allowing the feet to soak for five to 10 minutes reduces swelling, softens dead skin cells, and circulates stagnate energy.

1. Begin treatment by dry brushing skin to improve circulations and remove dead skin cuticle before submerging the feet in a bath.
2. Soak feet in herbal infusion and/or salts to cleanse, detoxify the skin, and treat skin condition(s).
 - Note: If you save the muslin parcel used to make herbal infusion you can use parcel to remove mask at the end of the treatment.
3. Apply mask to legs from ankle to knee.
4. Wrap legs with herbal infusion wrap. Massage client's shoulder and scalp, while mask sets for 10 minutes.

Hot Foot Bath Contraindications: Precautions

Individuals with paralysis, neuropathy, or other conditions that impair the nerve endings and cause reduced sensation should take hydrotherapy treatments only under the guidance of a trained therapist. Because these individuals cannot accurately sense temperature changes in the water, the temperature of the water needs to be cool to room temperature in order to prevent being seriously burned and should be administered with supervision. Diabetics and people with hypertension should also consult their healthcare professional before using hot tubs or other heat hydrotherapies, but do very well with cool to tepid herbal infusions.

Foot and arm baths can become breeding grounds for bacteria and other infectious organisms if they are not cleaned regularly, maintained properly, kept at the appropriate temperatures, and treated with the proper anti-viral/anti-microbial solutions.

Many authors have indicated that certain essential oils should not be used by pregnant or nursing women or by people with specific illnesses or physical conditions. Individuals suffering from any chronic or acute health condition should inform their therapist before starting treatment with any essential oil. Here are



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just a few that should be avoided or used with caution: Ajowan, basil, carrot seed, clove, myrrh gum, thyme, valerian, and wintergreen.

Essential oils such as cinnamon leaf, juniper, lemon, eucalyptus blue gum, peppermint, and thyme can be extremely irritating to the skin and should never be applied directly to the skin.

There are varying opinions on the safety of essential oils; however it is the belief of the world-renowned aromatherapy expert Martin Watt, that no essential oils that are used externally have been proven as harmful to a developing fetus. Every person's situation is different. Ultimately we should make our applications based on specialized training and intuition.

Hand and foot treatments are a great adjunct therapy that provides many holistic benefits. Being able to have eye-to-eye contact when administering treatment builds a professional relationship as well as confidence in the client's ability to apply products for home care. Hand and foot treatments are a health filled service that promotes wellbeing and helps your clients as they strive for wellness and longevity.



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Anne C. Willis LE, LME, founder of De La Terre Skincare, is a worldwide leader in Holistic and Medical skin therapies. Willis co-authored *The Esthetician's Guide to Working with Physicians* and has been featured in *New Beauty* and *Organic Spa Magazine*. She is the director of *Oncology Skin Therapeutics™* and a accredited skin care instructor, bringing over 30 years of experience and knowledge to the new generation of skin therapist.
info@delaterreskincare.com or www.delaterreskincare.com