

Study finds reflexology affects the hearts of non-cardiology patients

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(Medical Xpress) -- A three-year study by researchers at the University of Stirling has found that reflexology to the upper half of the left foot (the heart reflex point) had an effect on the hearts of healthy volunteers.

PhD researcher Jenny Jones, from the School of Nursing, Midwifery & Health, and Professor Steve Leslie, a cardiologist from the Cardiac Unit at Raigmore Hospital, carried out a study into the effects of reflexology in healthy volunteers and [patients](#) with [cardiac disease](#).

Reflexologists believe that various [reflex](#) points on the feet ‘map’ to individual body organs and if these reflex points are massaged, the organ gets more blood. This claim has not been rigorously tested before making the Stirling study the first of its kind. The study specifically tested the upper left ball of the sole which is said to ‘map’ to the [heart](#) and compared this area to other areas of both feet.

The study found that in healthy volunteers reflexology massage to the heart reflex point had a small effect on heart function. No heart function change was detected when ‘non-heart’ or unrelated areas of the feet were massaged. There was no change in the hearts of cardiology patients.

Researcher Jenny Jones said: “Reflexology is unique because it makes quite specific claims that it increases blood flow and this is something you can scientifically test. In our experiment with healthy people there was an inexplicable change in the heart function which occurred only when the heart reflex point area was massaged. We have no idea what

caused this change so we have applied for funding to investigate this further.”

She added: “Cardiology patients have problems with coronary blood flow so we wanted to find out if there was any impact on their [heart function](#) whilst receiving reflexology too. Interestingly, there was no effect on the hearts of cardiology patients; however all the patients found the treatment to be really relaxing, so it seems to be a safe and useful relaxation tool for cardiac patients to use.

“We want to investigate further why the hearts of cardiology patients are not affected in the same way as the healthy volunteers, with medication being a possible cause. We also want to research and better understand why this one area of the foot – the upper left ball of the sole - had an effect on the heart.”

Professor Steve Leslie added: “Most patients respond well to conventional medicine but for some patients symptoms of cardiac disease persist despite best medical treatments. For these patients we wished to test if reflexology was safe. The results of this study, demonstrated that reflexology did not affect cardiac function, heart rate or blood pressure and therefore it would appear safe for patients, even those with significant cardiac disease to undergo reflexology. Whether reflexology can improve cardiac symptoms requires further research.”

Jenny describes the UK’s complementary therapies market as “huge” and says there is clearly a large public interest in the topic.

She concluded: “There are limitations of what we can do with clinical medicine but there has not been much scientific research available on complementary therapies such as reflexology to help people decide if they work or not. However, if people are choosing to pay to have these complementary therapy treatments to treat symptoms when we have a

health care service which is free, you need to ask what it is that these therapies offer that is missing in conventional healthcare.”

The University plans to carry out further research to investigate whether the research effect is repeated in patients with various gradations of cardiac disease and other patient groups, in order to determine if a beneficial effect is likely and is safe.

Further research will have the potential to provide unique data to enable both reflexology purchasers and clinicians to evaluate the clinical and cost-effectiveness of reflexology.

Provided by University of Stirling

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