

History of reflexology



We know from early texts, illustrations and artifacts that the Egyptians, Chinese, Indians and American Indians worked on the feet to maintain physical, mental and spiritual balance. The oldest documentation depicting the practice of reflexology was unearthed in Egypt and dated around 2500BC. However, some credit its birth to the Incas, a very ancient Peruvian civilization, possibly reaching back to 12,000 BC. It is speculated that they passed their knowledge down through the American Indians, who still practice today.

Dr William Fitzgerald, after graduating in medicine in 1895, practised in hospitals in Vienna and London. In Vienna he came into contact with the work of Dr H Bressler who had been investigating the possibility of treating organs with pressure points. Fitzgerald continued his research while working with diseases of the ear, nose and throat in Connecticut. Through his own research and the knowledge gained in the past he found that if pressure was applied on the fingers, it would create a local anaesthetic effect on the hand, arm and shoulder, right up to the jaw, face, ear and nose. He was able to carry out minor surgical operations just using this pressure technique.

He divided the body into zones, which he used for anaesthetic effect. In 1917 the combined work of Dr Fitzgerald and Dr Bowers was published in the book 'Zone Therapy'. Dr Fitzgerald taught zone therapy to Dr Joseph Riley and his

wife, Elizabeth. Riley refined the techniques and made the first detailed diagrams and drawings of the reflex points located in the feet. His first book *Zone Therapy Simplified* was published in 1919.

Eunice Ingham (1879-1974), an assistant of Dr Fitzgerald instigated and made the greatest contribution to modern reflexology. Through her dedicated research, she was able to correlate the anatomical structure of the body with the energy zones found on the feet, and found that the feet provided a mirror image of the entire body. She also found that the greater sensitivity of the feet enhanced the treatment. Because of this, reflexology treatment is generally carried out on the feet rather than on the hands. She is recognised as the founder of foot reflexology.

Eunice Ingham took her work to the public and non-medical community because she realised that people could learn the proper reflexology techniques to help themselves and others. She spoke at many conventions and wrote two books, *Stories the Feet can tell* (1938) and *Stories the feet have told* (1963). Today her nephew continues her legacy and runs the International Institute of Reflexology in St Petersburg.

In 1960 one of her students, Doreen Bayly introduced reflexology to Great Britain, where she started a training school of reflexology.

In 1984 the Association of Reflexologists was set up and in 1993 The Reflexology Organisations Council came in to being.