

## Questions to ask the reflexologist

When you are asked the opportunity to visit a reflexologist, you may feel torn to go or not to go. It is a good idea to ask about the reflexologist's qualifications, training and experience. You may want to know what the cost of the session is, and whether the reflexologist is a member of a professional body.

## Do you provide other services or sell products?

It is a good idea to ask the reflexologist if they provide any other services, such as massage or aromatherapy. You may also want to ask if they sell any products, such as essential oils or reflexology tools.

## What kind of service do you provide?

Ask the reflexologist what kind of service they provide, and how long the session will last. You may also want to ask if they have any special techniques or tools that they use.

## How many sessions should I have?

Ask the reflexologist how many sessions they recommend, and how often you should have them. You may also want to ask if they have any advice on how to prepare for the session.

## Your questions answered

### When choosing a reflexologist

If seeking a reflexologist, consider the following factors for you. Reflexology is a complementary therapy, and should not be used as a substitute for medical treatment. It is a good idea to look for a reflexologist who has had a minimum of 100 hours of training, and who is a member of a professional body. Check the reflexologist's experience and qualifications. Also, find out if the reflexologist has worked successfully with health and mind concerns.

Every profession has its enthusiasts, individuals who are immersed in the work they do. If you find such a reflexologist, you may have found someone whose passion for the work is reflected by results.

When you start looking for a reflexologist, ask yourself the same of the reflexologist with a reputation for excellence. It is a good idea to ask for a sample session to see if they are a good fit for you.

When going for a reflexology session, be aware of your own tastes and keep a record of reasons why you decided to go. It is a good idea to ask the reflexologist if they have any special techniques or tools that they use.

## Evaluate your reflexology

session both during and afterwards. Does the kind of touch that has been worked on feel any different? Did you feel an overall sense of relaxation at the end of the session?





# TAKING CARE OF HANDS

Constantly in use throughout the day, our hands encounter many stresses and strains that can lead to problems. In this chapter, you'll find techniques for relaxing those hard-working hands, as well as tips on breaking up the stress of repetitive daily tasks such as typing. We also explain how ergonomics can help keep your hands happy by looking at the design of tools and equipment and the way you use them in your daily life.



# ANATOMY OF THE HAND

The versatility and dexterity of the hands result from their unique anatomy and physiology. Each hand is made up of 27 bones (making up one quarter of the body's total), connected by muscles and ligaments and served by blood, nerve, and sensory receptors. All of these make possible movements intrinsic to our daily lives, such as oppositional thumb, rotating wrist, and gripping strength.

The hand is undoubtedly the most versatile part of the skeleton, enabling us to grasp and manipulate objects; capable of carrying heavy weights, and supplied with extensive sensory capabilities. To consider the complexity of the hand's movements, think about bending your little finger. This simple act requires an orchestrated effort from brain to finger and back again, all the time activating a complicated arrangement of muscles, tendons, and nerves.

## THE BONES OF THE HAND

Of the 200–210 bones in the human body, 54 are in the hands, 27 in each. These include the phalanges (the bones of the fingers), the metacarpals (the long bones), and the carpals (the small bones of the wrist). Bone is living tissue, growing and changing throughout life, and constantly being renewed. During childhood, cartilage turns into bone in a regular sequence. Bones are given rigidity and hardness by minerals such as calcium and phosphorus, but give up these minerals in times of shortage in other parts of the body – hence the importance of having a regular supply in our diets. Bone marrow, which fills the cavities

A complex arrangement of bones, muscles, tendons, and nerves enables the hands to perform their intricate tasks.

Hands are rich in sensitive nerve endings, making them particularly receptive to reflexology work.

in the bones, is a soft, fatty substance that produces most of the body's blood cells.

Of particular importance in hand movement is a group of muscles responsible for the thumb, whose movements are involved in 50 percent of all the hand's activities. The thumb's ability to work in opposition to the fingers is noteworthy as it is this ability that makes possible actions such as grasping and manipulation. Holding a piece of paper, gripping a pen, or working with a screwdriver would be difficult if not impossible without this ability. To check this out for yourself, try to pick up a mug or a ball without involving your thumb.

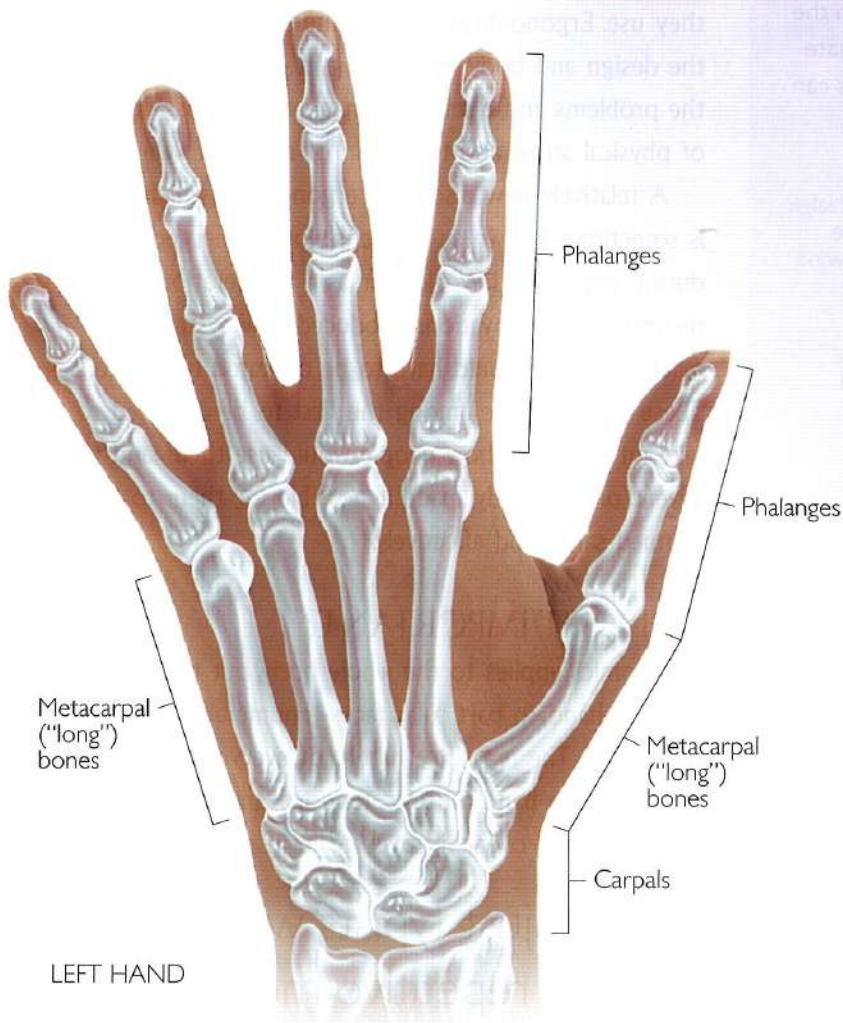
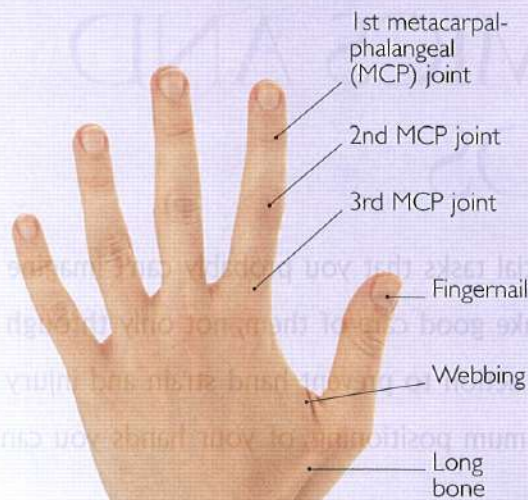
## THE HAND'S MOVEMENTS

Complex and intricate hand movements are achieved by activating the small muscles that are contained entirely within the hand, as well as the much larger muscles and tendons in the forearm. Consider, for example, the action of the thumb when thumb-walking (*see page 54*): as you apply the technique, which involves making only very small movements of the first joint of the thumb, you can observe the activity of the muscles in the forearm as the thumb moves.



## The bones of the hand

These consist of the bones of the wrist (the carpals), the long, straight bones of the palm (the metacarpals), and the bones of the fingers (the phalanges). The 14 phalanges are arranged in jointed, continuous segments that enable independent or united action. Bony support is provided to the palm of the hand by the five metacarpals. The eight carpal bones form the heel of the hand, joining the bones of the forearm to create the wrist.



## LOOKING AT THE HAND

An examination of the hand's appearance can reveal quite a lot about the health, age, and lifestyle of an individual. The fingernails, in particular, can be viewed as a window into health, their thin, transparent structure providing a glance into the blood vessels that flow under them.

The quality of the nails is an indicator of health and age. While vertical ridges come with aging, horizontal white lines may result from taking certain drugs while the nails were forming; or they may follow an infectious disease or recent surgery. Some changes, such as little white spots, can result from low-grade infections.

All-white nails may indicate liver problems, while nails that are half pink and half white may point to kidney disorders. Signs of diabetes include a yellowish tint and a slight pink coloring at the base of the nail. Yellow coloring can indicate lung illness, such as tuberculosis and asthma, and fungal infections. A whitish color may be indicative of chronic hepatitis or cirrhosis, while pale color may indicate anemia. Bluish nails may be a sign of circulation problems – this color has been connected to chronic lung disorders such as emphysema or asthma. It may also indicate heart failure or exposure to toxins such as copper or silver.

Nail color isn't the only indicator of health: brittle nails may indicate dehydration, especially if they split. Breaking, splitting fingernails could be a sign of thyroid problems, while misshapen nails may be a sign of arthritis or nutritional deficiency.

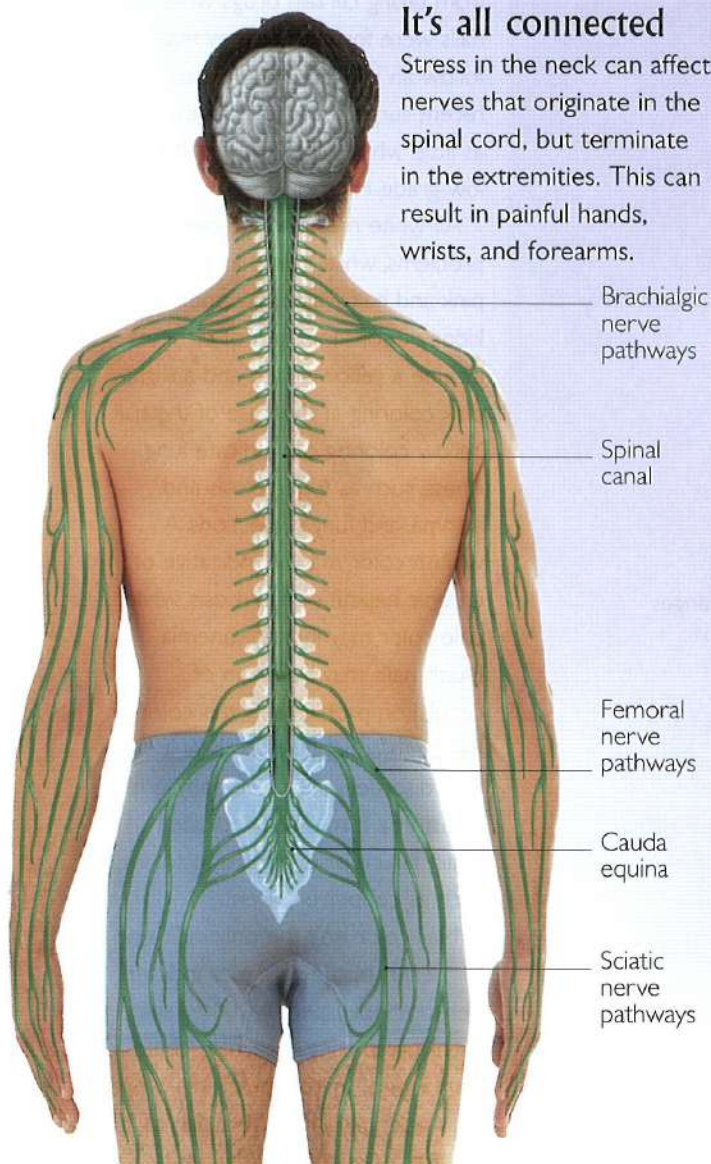


# ERGONOMICS AND THE HANDS

Your hands perform so many essential tasks that you probably can't imagine life without them. It is therefore important that you take good care of them, not only through the regular use of hand reflexology, but also by taking action to prevent hand strain and injury in the first place. By considering the ergonomics, or optimum positioning, of your hands you can ensure their well-being.

## It's all connected

Stress in the neck can affect nerves that originate in the spinal cord, but terminate in the extremities. This can result in painful hands, wrists, and forearms.



## WHAT IS ERGONOMICS?

Ergonomics is the study of the relationship between workers and their environment, especially the equipment they use. Ergonomists examine the interplay between the design and body positioning in order to prevent the problems and disabilities that may arise as a result of physical stress and the strain of repetitive work.

A relatively new discipline, ergonomics (which is sometimes known as biotechnology) emerged during the Second World War as a proliferation of technological innovations produced new systems and machinery that would have to be operated by workers. These systems were among the first to be designed to take into account how people would use them, and the advent of this study made it possible for them to be manned safely and effectively.

## WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?

Ergonomics applies to the whole body, but the hard-working hand, in particular, faces innumerable stresses and strains. The repetitive nature of everyday life means that the same hand muscles, tendons, and ligaments often get used over and over again in repetitive

It is not just typists who are at risk: any repetitive movement can damage the hands.



patterns. It almost goes without saying that those parts of the hand can become strained and overworked. It is not just typists and manual workers who are at risk: any manual activity that involves repetitive movement, including knitting, sewing, playing a musical instrument, or participation in sports — can damage the hands. If left untreated, this pattern of overuse will take its toll. For professionals who habitually use keyboards, for example, repetitive strain injuries such as tendonitis or carpal tunnel syndrome (*see pages 148–149*) can cause severe pain and may even end a career.

### WHAT SHOULD I DO?

The symptoms of conditions such as carpal tunnel syndrome, including pain, numbness, and tingling in the hands, result from compression at the wrist of the median nerve. Research indicates that general overall stress and body positioning are also causative factors. If you are experiencing pain, particularly in your hands or forearms, you should consider changing the way you

Consider changing the way you position your body (including your hands) when you work.

position your body (including your hands) when you work. For example, if you work at a desk, how high (or low) is your seat? If you use a computer, must you always reach across your desk to grasp the mouse? And how do you position your wrists over the keyboard as you type? Any of these factors may be contributing to the pain you are experiencing, if your work station is not properly arranged, and a simple change of body position could prevent further strain.

Check your hand position when using equipment such as kitchen knives (*see top, right*), keyboards (*see center, right*), and tennis raquets (*see bottom, right*).







As using a keyboard becomes ever-more common in the workplace and at home, stress-related hand injuries are also increasing. Applying reflexology techniques to relax the hands can play a vital role in preventing problems.

# HANDS: AN OWNER'S MANUAL

As hands work their way through the day, lifting and manipulating, touching and holding, they are constantly exposed to challenges. Don't take them for granted: they deserve to be treated with care for the vital role they play in our daily lives. Protect them from harsh elements, exercise them for peak performance, relax them as a respite from work, and pamper them as a reward for the work they do.

Just as it is important to warm up before embarking on an exercise routine, the hands too will benefit from a few warm-up exercises to prepare them for their day's work. A quick routine of stretches in the morning will help improve performance and prevent injury. Repeat these exercises at intervals during the day to ease fatigue and maintain flexibility.

## CREATE YOUR OWN HAND SPA

Hands appreciate pampering, from slathering with hand lotion, to having a professional manicure or hand-reflexology session. So create your own hand spa, where you can indulge your hands whenever they feel in need. Soak tired hands in a bowl of warm water, get the circulation going by rubbing with a loofah, rub them dry with a warm, soft towel, then apply a generous helping of hand lotion. Wear cotton gloves in bed to ensure that the hand lotion has maximum impact. A warm paraffin-wax bath is a luxurious addition to your hand spa, providing even more relaxing, moisturizing, and warming benefits.

## SKIN CARE

For many individuals, the work they do challenges the skin on the hands. If the job includes frequent hand-washing, especially with hot water and harsh soap — as, for example, in a hospital setting — protective oils in the skin are lost, leading to dry skin and chapping. The

hands of outdoor workers come in for particularly heavy use and need extra care to avoid problems. In general, use cool water and mild soap to wash the hands, followed by the use of hand lotion. Generously moisturize the hands at night before going to bed.

Don't use your hand as a hammer: while you may never have done this, we can assure you that others have.

## HAND-CARE DOS AND DON'TS

- Wearing gloves can prevent many hand injuries, so wear them whenever necessary. Wear gloves appropriate to the activity: strong, protective gloves for gardening; cloth-lined vinyl gloves when washing dishes or using cleaning compounds; cotton gloves when doing housework, to prevent the dryness caused by dust. And always wear gloves when out in cold weather.
- Be aware of safety in the kitchen, especially when using sharp knives. Grasping a bagel while cutting it, for example, results in some 100,000 visits to emergency rooms each year.
- When working in the garage or workshop, be cautious when using electric or hand tools.
- Help avoid injury by building hand awareness.



# USING SELF-HELP TOOLS

Self-help hand reflexology techniques do not always reach deep areas, and not everyone has the strength or mobility to apply hand reflexology techniques, but using golf balls or other tools can provide an effective alternative. A golf ball is a good, inexpensive option, but you may prefer the softer surface of a rubber ball. Round and cylindrical rubber pet toys also make great tools.

You don't have to purchase the specialist reflexology self-help tools shown below. A generic rubber ball can work just as well.



## Using health balls

Health balls (*see below*) are typically made of metal or smooth, round polished rock, and they are meant to be used in pairs. Throughout China, Japan, and the rest of the Far East, where reflexology is common practice, health balls are a familiar sight in shops. Supplementing your hand-reflexology routines with the use of health balls several times a week can help to build flexibility in the hands, strengthen muscles

in the reflex areas, and develop hand awareness. To use them, hold both balls in one hand and, using the digits of the same hand, move them in a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction. Then change hands and repeat. If you do not have access to health balls, try using two golf balls instead. However, you may find that the heavier weight of health balls makes them more suitable for the exercise.

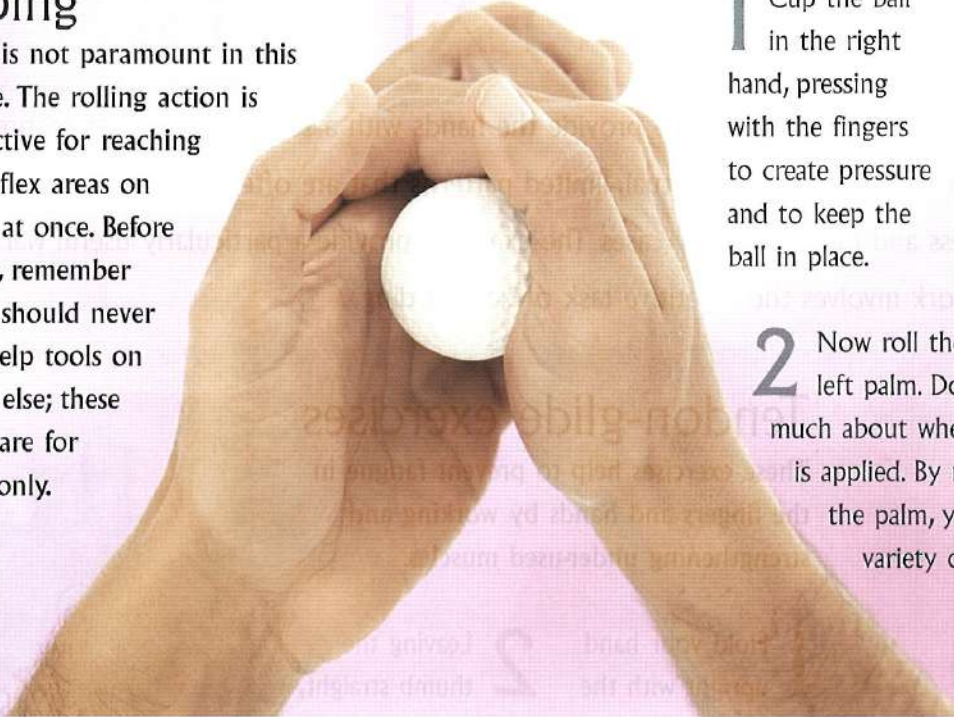


The action for moving health balls around the hand is similar to that of drumming the fingers on a flat surface (*see above*). Strike first with the little finger, then the other digits, in turn.



## Cupping

Precision is not paramount in this technique. The rolling action is very effective for reaching several reflex areas on the palm at once. Before you start, remember that you should never use self-help tools on someone else; these exercises are for self-help only.



**1** Cup the ball in the right hand, pressing with the fingers to create pressure and to keep the ball in place.



**2** Now roll the ball around the left palm. Don't worry too much about where the pressure is applied. By rolling around the palm, you will cover a variety of reflex areas.

## Pressing

This technique allows you to reach reflex areas located in the heels of both hands simultaneously. Increase the pressure by tightening your grip.



Interlace the fingers of both hands, trapping the ball between the heels of the hands. Roll the ball around, tightening or loosening the grasp to alter the pressure.

## Gripping

Use this technique to work the reflex areas on and around the fingers and thumbs. Be careful not to overwork the areas by using too much pressure.



Hold the ball with the index and middle fingers of the right hand. Rest the ball on the left thumb, as shown, wrapping the right thumb around the top of the hand.



# RELAXATION EXERCISES

The aim of these relaxation exercises is to provide the hands with a series of stretches to prepare them for work and to break up the habitual, limited patterns that are often followed during the day, leading to stress and injury in many cases. The exercises provide a particularly useful warm-up for those whose work involves the repetitive task of keyboarding.

## Tendon-glide exercises

These exercises help to prevent fatigue in the fingers and hands by working and strengthening under-used muscles.

- 1** Hold your hand upright with the fingers and thumb outstretched.
- 2** Leaving the thumb straight, curl your fingers in on themselves, making a hook.
- 3** Still keeping your thumb straight, curl your fingers over and touch the palm with the fingertips.
- 4** Curl the fingers and thumb into a fist and squeeze. Repeat several times.

### LEARNING TIP

Practice the tendon-glide exercises before work, repeating each one 3–5 times to start with, and gradually working up to 10 repetitions. Use the directional-movement stretches throughout the day to provide relaxation for the hands.





## Directional-movement stretches

For those who regularly perform a repetitive task such as typing, it is important to break up habitual

stress patterns. These exercises, known as directional-movement stretches, are particularly useful.



**1** Position the left hand with the palm facing upward. Rest the right hand on the palm, with the heel at the base of the fingers. Press down with the fingers of the top hand. Hold for several seconds, then change hands and repeat.

**2** Rest one hand on top of the other, with the fingers wrapped around the inner aspect of the hand. Press down with the fingers of the top hand, hold momentarily, then change hands and repeat.

**3** Again resting one hand on top of the other, wrap the fingers around the outer aspect of the lower hand. Press down with the heel of the top hand, hold the position briefly, then change hands and repeat.



**4** Finally, rest one hand on top of the other. Press down with the heel of the upper hand for a few seconds before changing hands and repeating the exercise.