

# **REFLEXOLOGY IN PREGNANCY AND BIRTH**

**By Amanda Gwynne Long**

**Definition:** reflexology is a natural holistic therapy based on the theory that points on the feet and hands correspond to specific organs and systems in the body.

Thus, by applying gentle pressure to these points the related area of the body is stimulated and encouraged to clear itself of congestion. Reflexology promotes deep relaxation which encourages the body's own self healing process and return to equilibrium. It is a calming and enjoyable treatment, which is particularly useful in today's stressful lifestyle. Maternity reflexology is specifically tailored to treat infertility, pregnancy, birth and the puerperium. Many reflexologists can even detect and palpate the growing fetus on the reflex zones of the feet (Enzer S. 2004)

**Pregnancy:** from the early stages of morning sickness to delivery discomfort, pregnancy can be physically and emotionally demanding. Reflexology can help with the relief of many complaints during pregnancy. These include;

- Morning sickness
- Headaches and migraines
- Frequency and bladder problems
- Backache and musculo skeletal disorders such as symphysis pubis dysfunction
- Stress and anxiety
- Insomnia
- Digestive problems e.g. constipation
- Heartburn
- Swollen and puffy ankles and legs
- High blood pressure

**Labour and birth:** reflexology can play an important role prior to and during labour and birth. Many women have reflexology to help stimulate the onset of labour, especially if they are overdue. Reflexology may stimulate the release of oxytocin to encourage the onset of uterine contractions. Women that have undergone a course of reflexology in pregnancy often find that the overall length of their labour is reduced. A casual study by Motha and McGrath (1993) on 64 women showed that it was effective in treating a range of symptoms during pregnancy. Labour length also appeared to be significantly reduced and 89% of women in the study achieved a normal vaginal delivery.

**During labour** reflexology can be used to help regulate contractions, aid relaxation during contractions and reduce the amount of pain experienced. Reflexology can be used at any stage of labour and it's effects may be experienced within 15 minutes of treatment.

**Postnatal period:** once baby has arrived life is hectic establishing new routines. lack

of sleep, erratic feeding times and general exhaustion often occurs. This is the time that new parents can particularly benefit from reflexology, if they can only set aside a little time for themselves.

Reflexology can help to:

- Aid calm and relaxation
- Increase energy levels
- Rebalance the body
- Help to stabilise body weight
- Aid lactation
- Reduce the incidence of postnatal depression

**Contraindications:** include major placental disturbance such as placental praevia or abruption, ectopic pregnancy, threatened miscarriage, fever or infection and any unstable pregnancy about which the therapist is unsure.

### **Conclusion**

There seems to be many advantages in using reflexology during your pregnancy, and I'm sure the potential benefits in using this therapy to relieve pain and reduce the time spent in labour are attractive to expectant mothers! It is certainly a therapy which complements conventional midwifery, and should be integrated into orthodox midwifery within the NHS. However, more research is needed to evaluate and monitor the advantages of reflexology at this very special time.

### **References**

Enzer S. *Maternity Reflexology Manual*. Hart Press, 2004.

Motha G, McGrath J 1993. *The effects of reflexology on labour outcome*. Journal of Association of Reflexologists: 2-4.

**For more information or to book an appointment please contact Amanda on 07818 415516 or visit the website [www.highlandholistics.co.uk](http://www.highlandholistics.co.uk)**