

Stressed out? Reflexology and the Nervous System. Why it works.

The human body is a remarkable thing. I think we take the magic of it for granted. We wouldn't function at all if it weren't for the Nervous System.

Composed of the Central Nervous System and Peripheral Nervous System, ***the nervous system runs the body***. There are also the special senses: the eyes, ears, and skin. They give us messages from the outside.

The central nervous system (CNS) consists of the brain and spinal cord. The brain is protected by the skull; the spinal cord is protected by the spine. We know the brain controls: speech, hearing, sight, and emotion. The hypothalamus - located in the brain, is an interlink between the nervous and endocrine systems. It connects to the pituitary gland and plays a key role in maintaining body homeostasis – balance. I believe our body always tries to return to a state of balance.

The peripheral nervous system (PNS) is both voluntary and autonomic: made up of nerves and their branches that start in the brain or spinal cord, leave them and go to other parts of the body. Vertebrae protect the spinal cord. The vertebrae get larger as they move down the spine, this makes sense as there's more of us to support. Between each vertebra is a disc. Pairs of nerves exit each vertebrae. The voluntary part of the peripheral nervous system is all the nerves that go to and from the muscles that you have some control over. The autonomic part of the peripheral nervous system is all the nerves that travel to your organs and glands. We have little conscious control over these nerves.

The peripheral nervous system contains 12 pairs of nerves starting in the brain going to structures of the head and neck and 31 pairs of spinal nerves starting in the spinal cord travelling to the rest of the body. The peripheral nerves exit the spinal cord and run around the body, like veins and arteries. There are motor and sensory nerves. Sensory nerves move in the direction of the brain, motor nerves move away from the brain.

Most of us experience a pinched sciatic nerve from time-to-time. The biggest nerve; the size of a man's thumb at its largest point, it carries a major portion of signals from the sacral plexus to the legs, exits the spinal column and feeds the legs and branches off. Where it leaves the spinal column it is prone to compression and this is often the sciatic pain people experience. In a reflexology treatment we work four reflexes specific to the sciatic nerve.

A plexus is a bundle of nerves. There are many of them throughout the body. The solar plexus, in the middle of the diaphragm, is one most of us are familiar with. We've all felt, in a moment of shock, a little punch in the gut. This is the solar plexus firing as it sets off the fight or flight response of the sympathetic nervous system.

Imagine you are reading a book in your favourite chair and suddenly a door slams shut.

The sympathetic nervous system revs the system up -- moves us into fight or flight (state of stress), increases the heart rate, blood pressure, and blood sugar, and moves blood to the extremities. It stops the digestive process. This is a basic response to threat.

I think a major problem with our culture is we are stuck in sympathetic nervous system overload. We don't go into this state as an occasional thing, but are rather living in this state 24 hours a day, and are showing stress-related disease. As an example: We wake in the morning, haven't even got out of bed and we are already going through our to do list for the day. This isn't natural.

The parasympathetic nervous system slows the system down. A state of rest and repair, this system lowers our heart rate and blood pressure. This is the optimum time for us to efficiently digest our food. It should be clear to us -- in this hectic world, our digestive systems aren't working properly. It's no wonder many people have digestive issues.

During a reflexology treatment, the practitioner focuses on the brain, head, hypothalamus, eyes, ears, inner ear, solar plexus, and sciatic nerve reflexes.

The beauty of a **reflexology treatment is it immediately switches a person's nervous system from sympathetic mode (fight or flight), to parasympathetic mode (rest and repair).** This occurs during each reflexology session.

As a reflexologist, I notice the person's breathing slow down, they may sigh, feel sleepy, their mood may change from one of agitation to one of peacefulness. **This should be normal.** The body wants to be in a state of homeostasis – balance. Unfortunately, this delicious calm feeling is rare.

If you are unable to have a reflexology treatment, a few other ways you can support your nervous system and reduce stress, are: laugh, smile, exercise, meditate, breathing exercises, and walking in nature.

Throughout my life experiences; broken leg, multiple surgeries, recent wrist trauma, stress -- of all these things, what fills me with awe, is the resilience of the human body.

The nervous system is intimately linked to the endocrine system which I will talk about next time.

I'm curious to hear your thoughts and experiences and hope you'll share with me in the comments section.

With loving and warmth,

Brin