

BY MEENA AZZOLLINI

ZONE IN, BABY

PUT YOUR FEET UP, RELAX AND JOIN THE MANY PREGNANT WOMEN WHO HAVE EXPERIENCED THE WONDROUS BENEFITS OF MATERNITY REFLEXOLOGY.

Pregnancy is a wonderful time in a woman's life. The joys are abundant but so is the pain and discomfort. The physical, emotional and mental changes can be hard on many women. Up to 75 per cent of expectant mothers are nauseous during their pregnancies, whether it is in the morning or evening. More than 50 per cent of them experience fluid retention in their hands or feet and most women suffer from fatigue, constipation and cramping. Since there is not much medication that can be taken at this precarious time of their lives, most will deal with the physical, emotional and mental changes by finding comfortable and natural solutions to alleviate these symptoms. Reflexology, an ancient form of healing, is one such solution and an emerging one in Australia.

No one knows that better than Lyndall Mollart, champion of maternity reflexology. A trained midwife with over 20 years' experience and a qualified reflexologist with 10 years of research and work in the field, she was responsible for introducing a reflexology policy in her local maternity unit. "Reflexology is like having a full body massage on your feet," she says. "Regular reflexology makes pregnant women feel better and they are happier to go through their pregnancy," she explains.

Reflexology increases the health and wellbeing of women and provides a comforting and nurturing environment for both mother and baby. "Case studies have shown that women who have frequent sessions of reflexology throughout their pregnancies have beautiful births and their babies' are more settled as they experience the benefits of reflexology, too. Babies' breastfeed better. Even women who have had a caesarean section seem to recover quicker," Lyndall says.

During the first three months of pregnancy, the foetus will produce a hormone called human chorionic gonadotropin (hCG). The mother's body reacts and produces relaxin, an ovarian hormone that works to soften the pelvic muscles in preparation for birth. Such dramatic hormonal changes during pregnancy can be overwhelming, causing imbalances in physiological functions and changes in the emotional wellbeing of a woman. As Angela Young, a reflexologist from Western Australia, has aptly said, "I often give an example of a garden hose with water trickling out at one end. We see something is wrong with the flow and we need to find out if there is a kink in the hose and rectify it to allow water to flow freely and strongly again." Reflexology clears these imbalances and "kinks" in vital energy channels, which become blocked due to stresses and hormonal changes.

A reflexology session involves the application of pressure using specific thumb and finger technique, stretching and movement on reflex points located in the feet, hands and ears. The most common area for treatment is the foot. This 5000-year-old therapy is sometimes called zonal therapy as the body is divided into zones with corresponding reflex points located in the hands and feet. By stimulating these points, a message is sent to the spine and the central nervous system and from there a signal is sent to the brain and other organs of the body. Thus, reflexology promotes relaxation, improves circulation, stimulates vital organs and encourages the natural healing process of the body, creating a harmonious working together of the mind, body and soul.

During a maternity reflexology treatment, gentle techniques are emphasised to nurture both mother and baby. Reflexologists adapt the pressure and may vary the length of each session or ask the woman to sit or lie down in a particular position depending on the stage of pregnancy.

Maternity reflexology is increasingly used by reflexologists and midwives through every stage of pregnancy, from preconception to pregnancy, labour, postnatal and baby reflex. According to maternity-reflexology.net, "Reflexology as a natural therapy complements the natural state of pregnancy."

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MATERNITY REFLEXOLOGY AND FERTILITY

Never thinking IVF would fail after having her first-born using the technology, Rachel was shattered when she lost her second baby after eight transfers. "I wanted to rid my body of all the IVF drugs. I had a very active and demanding little boy to look

after and had to get on top of my grief and not allow myself to be depressed. Two months after she died I did personal training, tried naturopathy and discovered reflexology," says Rachel.

Rachel was a bit sceptical initially of the benefits of reflexology and about having her feet rubbed. But in her reflexologist she found a caring and nurturing person who not only helped her deal with her loss and anger but prepared her mind and body for another IVF transfer seven months later. Rachel became pregnant in the first transfer. Unfortunately, she lost her baby again. "The complications I had were nothing to do with reflexology but an undiagnosed incompetent cervix that caused me to lose my third baby at five months," confides Rachel.

Rachel continued seeing her reflexologist every two weeks initially, then once a month, and became pregnant for the fourth and final time using one of her last few embryos. At the time of writing this article, Rachel was 13 weeks pregnant and was continuing to see her reflexologist. "What reflexology did for me was calm me down and have me in a place where I felt relaxed, happy and much more able to deal with things."