

ISN'T REFLEXOLOGY JUST ANOTHER NAME FOR FOOT MASSAGE?

Isn't reflexology just a fancier name for foot massage? Aren't they just one and the same thing? The answer is a very emphatic *no*! Unfortunately, the terms "reflexology" and "foot massage" are often used interchangeably by the public, massage therapists, and even some reflexologists, but the fact of the matter is reflexology and massage are two very distinct disciplines with their own definitions, history, scope of practice, purpose, applications, and techniques as seen in the diagram below:

	Reflexology	Massage
Definition	Reflexology is a protocol of manual techniques, such as thumb- and finger-walking, hook and backup and rotating-on-a-point, applied to specific reflex areas predominantly on the feet and hands. These techniques stimulate the complex neural pathways linking body systems, supporting the body's efforts to function optimally.	The systematic and scientific manipulation of the soft tissues of the entire body.
Basic Premise	Zones and reflex areas exist in the feet, hands, and outer ears corresponding to all areas of the body. Reflexology works through the nervous system and subtle energy pathways.	Stroking restores metabolic imbalance within the soft tissue. Massage works through the musculature.
Purpose	To improve the function of organs, glands, and all systems of the body. Works with the function of the body.	To primarily change the soft tissue directly stimulated. Works with the structure of the body.
Scope of Practice	Extremities only. From ankles and wrists distally to the tips of the toes and fingers. Outer ears.	Entire body.

Application	Applied to specific areas, usually feet, hands, and outer ears, to promote a response from an area far removed from tissue stimulated via the nervous system and subtle energy pathways. Only footwear is removed, as only the feet, hands and outer ears are touched.	Applied to muscles and connective tissues of entire body for local benefit. Most, if not all, clothing is removed as most of the body is touched.
Techniques	Uses alternating pressures of the thumb and fingers, hook and backup, and rotation-on-a-point.	Uses large muscle movement of whole hands (either opened or closed) and sometimes feet, arms and elbows. Tapping, kneading, stroking, friction and shaking are employed.

The effectiveness of reflexology is recognized worldwide by various national health institutions, including the National Institutes of Health, as a distinct complementary practice within the holistic health field. In addition, the distinction between reflexology and massage has been clearly delineated by exemptions from the massage law in 32 states and through passage of separate reflexology laws in five states.

Reflexologists in New Hampshire, Nevada, North Dakota, Tennessee, and Washington have different licensing requirements from massage therapists in these states. In order to obtain a license in reflexology, an applicant must typically provide proof of having met certain educational standards (i.e., graduation from a program involving so many hours specific to reflexology training) and/or certification by the American Reflexology Certification Board. Without this required proof, reflexologists cannot obtain a license and practice legally in those states.

As one can see, reflexology differs from massage on multiple levels – from definition and techniques to legalities in licensing – so, whether a reflexology practitioner or a reflexology consumer, be sure to call it by its real name – “*reflexology*” – and not “*foot massage*.”