

Sleep issues and Diaphragm Rocking from the VRT repertoire



Lack of a good night's sleep has serious effects on our brain's ability to function and many people sleep very lightly during restless nights. This can result in impaired cognitive function the next day, as well as making concentration more difficult and shortening the attention span. Calming the body, with specific techniques to facilitate a deep relaxing sleep, can be one of greatest therapeutic gifts a reflexologist can give to their clients. Soon after I qualified as a reflexologist in early 1993, I had a series of clients who all complained of insomnia, but it manifested itself in many different ways. I was keen to try and help each individual, but realised that I needed a general formula and technique to help re-set the client's body clock, regardless of their age, health condition or sleep patterns.

A small child often falls asleep when it is held and rocked as this represents fundamental security and relaxation. So my first instinct was to experiment with techniques to rock the feet or hands, focusing on the diaphragm reflexes. To relax we need to breathe rhythmically, so I included the lung reflexes in the rocking sequence by simultaneously holding the diaphragm points with my thumbs and the lung reflexes with my fingertips. At first I asked the clients to breathe in and out in time to the rocking of their feet, but I soon realised this was

totally counter-productive. This deeply soothing technique, that I named Diaphragm Rocking (DR), appears to relax the body at a profound level and the clients naturally found their own soothing breathing cycle without having to try and concentrate.

Children particularly enjoyed the novelty of hand rocking and this was something that parents could easily share. I then began to develop Vertical Reflex Therapy (VRT) and found that these same DR techniques had the ability to help balance the body, directing energy to where the body needed it. For example, I rocked the feet to help a sleep issue and a client reported that their right ear had gone warm and had "popped" and felt clearer. Until then I had not been aware that they had had a right ear infection the week before as they had forgotten to tell me.



I had great success with this specific reflexology rocking technique on one male client to help overcome sleep issues due to stress and also jet lag from business trips. My formula, as part of a reclining classical reflexology session, was to rock the feet for 1-2 minutes at a time, several times during a reflexology session. Then I would give the client homework to rock their hands before bed at night or if they woke in the night, to help them get back to sleep.

How much sleep is required?

There is no set amount of time that everyone needs to sleep, since it varies from person to person. Results from the sleep profiler indicate that people like to sleep anywhere between 5 and 11 hours, with the average being 7.75 hours. Any parent with a new baby will know how difficult it is to function properly on lack of sleep.

Where sleep issues are concerned you need to be a reflexology detective!

The combination of applying simple detective work to the client's physical situation, coupled with gentle reflexology techniques, can make a tremendous difference to years of interrupted and shallow sleep.

- If a person has to get up for the toilet more than once in the night, suggest they drink less fluid in the evenings but advise them to consume more in the day to ensure correct hydration levels.
- Ask what sort of bed the client sleeps in. Old beds and pillows can be too soft or too hard and can have a very detrimental effect on posture as well as quality of sleep.
- Sometimes introducing blackout blinds or curtains in the bedroom can help enormously especially in the early morning summer light.

Good health is a precious commodity and sleep is a great healer. Reflexology can play a very positive role in helping our clients to achieve a good night's sleep.

Diaphragm Rocking on the Hand and Foot to aid Sleep and Relaxation

Method: Always repeat the technique on both feet and/or hands.

Feet to help another: place your fingers on the dorsum of the foot in a "V" facing their ankles. Press your thumbs on the plantar diaphragm reflex and gently rock the foot backwards and forwards 10-20 times. The client can be instructed to use self-help hand reflexology at night.

Hands for self-help: Use this technique before sleep and, if you wake up in the night, repeat the procedure as often as necessary. Apply Diaphragm Rocking by placing your thumb in a stationery position on the palm as indicated and gently rock your fingers back and forward 10 -20 times; slowly straightening the fingers and then curling them closed.



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References/ Useful links

St Monica Trust: residential care facility, Bristol (www.stmonicastrust.org.uk).

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