

On the face of things

Though I like how my skin looks after a decent facial, I always feel mildly uncomfortable having one, wondering what all those lotions and potions are doing to my insides. I notice that when I've had a deep, restful night's sleep, enjoyed a long walk in the fresh air, or eaten a toxin free diet for a week, my skin takes on a similar, rosy, plumped look naturally, and I tend to avoid facials when I see them on spa menus.

This is a shame, as I always find the massage you get with a good facial supremely relaxing as well as firming for the skin.

I was intrigued then, to try facial reflexology. Like foot reflexology, this treatment is based on the theory that areas on your face are connected to areas of your body, and stimulating them improves underlying energy imbalances to promote well-being. It isn't a facial, but has rather handy beautifying side-effects, quite literally "lifting" the face to make it feel and look smoother and more toned. As well as encouraging lymphatic drainage, the massage techniques stimulate the facial nerves, blood flow and muscles, helping to build up new skin tissue and improve skin tone.

Holistic therapist Lone Sorensen Lopez developed facial reflexology over a period of 30 years. Traveling in South America, Lopez saw the Mapuche indians massaging each other's faces and was intrigued to find out why. Her treatment also draws on Chinese and Vietnamese body maps, where nerve points or meridians are used to relate to different parts of the body, as well as modern neuroanatomy. Despite such a rich history, the treatment is relatively new on spa menus, though it's spreading fast. It is now available



in 15 countries and there are just over 3,500 qualified facial reflexologists worldwide.

My therapist was the UK based Graham Sluter, who before my treatment told me how the therapy works. Sluter applied a natural rose mosqueta mask to my face and neck. This enabled him to work deeply without dragging the skin. The smell was soothing - aromatherapy is an integral part of the treatment.

He started very gently, with a soothing circular massage to the acupuncture points on my face, and continued with firmer, investigative strokes, feeling for the texture under my skin which would indicate parts of my body that were out of balance. I was suffering at the time from a cough and blocked nostrils, and started to cough quite violently - he began working on the area that related to my lungs with much firmer, faster strokes.

I soon began to fade out, and went to that place beyond sleep that makes well-carried out holistic treatments so relaxing. This is because the treatment releases endorphins, but also because the face is so near the brain, the control centre of the body, and in my case, a busy list-making part of my anatomy

that finds it hard to rest.

Sluter's techniques sent messages to my brain and really helped me switch off. When I "woke up" I felt an intriguing combination of rest and elation.

Sluter sat me up, gave me a glass of water and told me what he'd found - lung fragility, stomach sensitivity and tiredness. But I felt renewed, and looking in the mirror much later, saw my skin was

glowing. It felt much more comfortable to know that the glow had come from stimulated acupuncture points rather than a tub of cream.

As well as dealing with imbalances that develop through daily life, facial reflexologists claim that a course of treatments can help people with specific health issues. It has been used for sufferers of insomnia, stress, menopausal hormone imbalances, digestive complaints, migraines and muscle tension.

Like most holistic therapies, there is so far only anecdotal evidence to support these claims, but having read lots of first-person accounts since, such evidence is consistently positive. I, for one will be booking regular sessions from now on. For more information, visit www.globalfacial.com.

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