Stirring tunes ease Parkinson’s

Walking while listening to rousing music may ease some of the symptoms of Parkinson’s disease, according to research, writes Roger Dobson.

Patients who listened to music on an iPod during a 30-minute walk three times a week for 13 weeks improved their walking and the severity of their movement symptoms diminished after treatment, suggesting long-term benefits.

‘Our findings show that patients who trained with a music programme improved their gait and other factors,’ says Dr Lesley Brown, who led the study at the University of Lethbridge, Canada. ‘This is the first study to demonstrate that music listening can be safely implemented among Parkinson’s disease patients during exercises.’

Parkinson’s disease affects about 120,000 people in the UK, most of whom are over 50. Sufferers do not have enough of the brain chemical dopamine, which is involved in movement. The main symptoms are tremor or shaking, slowness of movement and rigidity.

In the study, 30-minute playlists of stirring tunes were developed for each patient, based on individual choices. The tempo was matched to the preferred walking speeds of each person.

Those who had music therapy had a significant increase in walking speed and a reduction in stride time. There was also improvement in motor symptom severity after 13 weeks.

Just how the music works to have such an effect is not clear, but it is known that carrying out tasks at the same time can improve co-ordination skills.

Treets, insomnia, digestive problems, joint pain, menopausal flushes and memory loss: all of these are common conditions that can be hard to treat, leaving sufferers in despair.

Some turn to complementary therapies such as reflexology. It works by stimulating pressure points on the feet that correspond with specific body parts. An estimated 35,000 reflexologists are now practising in Britain and a growing number are now using the face, rather than the feet or hands, to deliver this health therapy.

According to its advocates, facial reflexology is effective because the face has a large number of nerves and blood vessels.

Facial reflexology combines massage with theories based on acupuncture and Chinese concepts of energy lines, or meridians.

According to Chinese medicine, our energy flows through the body via 12 invisible meridians. If these energy lines become blocked, imbalances occur, and this imbalance can result in aches, pains, insomnia and even irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Facial reflexologists say they can feel a change of texture as a result of these ‘imbalances’ under the upper layer of skin on the face. They are said to feel like lumps of porridge or grains of sand.

By working over the face (excluding the eyelids) with the fingertips, they claim, break down these deposits, boosting the energy, circulatory and nervous systems.

The brain is the control centre of the body and the face is much closer to it than the feet are, so face reflexology can work faster than foot reflexology,’ says leading facial reflexology practitioner Nikke Ariff.

Ms Ariff, who has a clinic in London, explains that each session begins by stimulating the acupuncture points on the face using acupressure (pressing on them with the fingertips and rotating them on the spot). As well as being ‘energy points’ they are, according to Ms Ariff, important blood circulation and nerve supply areas.

She warms the face and corresponding body areas, releasing muscle tension and allowing more blood to flow through. The theory is that the face is a micromap of the body so, by working on a particular point of the micromap, you can affect the corresponding body part, calming it if there is inflammation or stimulating it if there is sluggishness.

The reflexologist uses the fingertips to make deep, sweeping massage movements or short, fast strokes. Sessions last for 45 to 50 minutes.

Ms Ariff says: ‘The treatment relaxes the entire body, and when the body relaxes, you start to heal. It’s no longer putting all its energy into stress.’

Often clients are so relaxed by the therapy that they drift off into a dreamy state that some describe as being like ‘going under’.

The treatment is popular with those suffering from conditions that may be stress-related such as insomnia, tension headache and IBS. In some IBS patients, for example, there is a strong link between stress and symptoms, especially constipation. If stress can be alleviated, gut symptoms may improve.

Constitutional constipation can be alleviated too.

Although IBS is normally treated through changes to diet and, if necessary, medication to alleviate abdominal pain and constipation or diarrhoea, there are those for whom such treatments do not work or who are reluctant to stick to them, and for whom reflexology may provide relief.

The medical director of digestive diseases charity Core, Dr Anton Emmanuel, also consultant gastroenterologist at University College London, cites a study in which constipated patients...
Don't pop a pill, press your face

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According to reflexology theory, specific points on the face are connected via meridian lines (energy lines) that run throughout the body connecting systems and organs. Each point is mirrored on the other half of the face.

A facial reflexologist is an expert in manipulating these points which correspond to acupuncture points in Chinese medicine – and using other massage-like strokes. These points can be used to treat such localized symptoms as tension headaches or sinus problems. There are some simple steps you can take which may help alleviate some common conditions. Press fingertips softly on one pair at a time, circling gently without lifting fingers. Circle slowly eight to ten times.

STOMACH: Press and circle all three stomach points and small intestine point.

HEARTBURN: Press and circle all three bladder points.

SLEEP PROBLEMS: Press and circle all three bladder points.

Any persistent symptoms should be reported to your GP.

NOW TRY IT YOURSELF

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