

Giving a hand to help

For the fifth year in a row, volunteers from the Maine Council of Reflexologists will provide free reflexology services for athletes at the Tri for a Cure on July 20.

Reflexology is a therapeutic massage therapy primarily for feet. Research has shown that massage therapy is beneficial in various ways. The Maine Council of Reflexologists Cancer Committee cites the results of a recent research that has determined that reflexology can improve the quality of life for patients with breast cancer, advanced cancer and undergoing chemotherapy. (www.branchreflexology.com/nih-grant-results/).

The National Institute of Health granted Michigan State University \$3.1 million to provide research into the benefits of reflexology for cancer patients. The results indicate that reflexology improved patients' ability to carry groceries, climb stairs, ease breathing, improve sleep patterns and other measures. Following the study, a number of hospitals in Michigan incorporated reflexology into their treatment protocols for breast cancer patients.

The results were so positive that the NIH has made a second grant to the same research group. Michigan State University has developed a protocol for caregivers to provide a modified reflexology treatment to administer their loved ones. The Maine Council of Reflexologists Cancer Committee plans to teach this protocol to caregivers in the community so they will be able to use the technique as often as they wish for their loved one.

The Mayo Clinic notes that while more research is needed to confirm the benefits of massage, it may be helpful for a variety of health ailments. In addition to easing sore muscles, reducing joint pain and helping soft tissue strains or injuries, massage can promote relaxation, reduce anxiety and calm feelings of stress. Massage reduces levels of the stress hormone cortisol. This helps to lift spirits and can often lower blood pressure. Massage also may help to boost the neurotransmitters dopamine and serotonin, which are associated with depression.

According to Health magazine, massage also can help promote healthy sleep. It has something to do with the effect of massage on delta waves, which are the brain waves connected to deep sleep. There is some evidence that massage can also increase white blood cell counts, promoting improved immunity.

And, a report published in 2011 in the American College of Physicians' Annals of Internal Medicine said that massage helps people in pain feel and function better than those who do not receive treatment. Massage can alleviate stiffness and pain and promote a better range of motion. It also can reduce risk for migraines and decrease pain from tension headaches.

For more information about reflexology and the Maine Council of Reflexologists, see www.reflexologyofmaine.org or contact Lynn Marie Danforth, Hands on Feet, 207-318-0129, handsonfeet1@gmail.com.