



Reflexology Research Program Case Study - Fibromyalgia

About the program

Reflexions is a Hobart based reflexology and massage business operated by therapist and professional reflexologist, Tiziana Hill.

Her six to eight week Reflexology Research Program is offered to clients to help reduce pain and symptoms associated with a range of conditions, measuring the effectiveness of weekly reflexology treatments. Clients pay a reduced hourly fee for each treatment and consent to measure and document their progress using a Visual Analog Scale and simple questionnaire. Pseudonyms have been used in all case study reports for the privacy of the clients.

The program commenced in 2020. It is not associated with any university or research organisation. Data and observations are collected for the purpose of preparing case studies and the names of participants are not revealed.

Case Study 1: The effect of reflexology treatments for reducing the symptoms of fibromyalgia

1. Fibromyalgia

According to the Mayo Clinic, fibromyalgia is "a disorder characterized by widespread musculoskeletal pain accompanied by fatigue, sleep, memory and mood issues. Researchers believe that fibromyalgia amplifies painful sensations by affecting the way your brain and spinal cord process painful and nonpainful signals."

Symptoms can either begin following a physical or psychological event or develop over time with no apparent triggering event.

"Many people who have fibromyalgia also have tension headaches, temporomandibular joint (TMJ) disorders, irritable bowel syndrome, anxiety and depression. While there is no cure for fibromyalgia, a variety of medications can help control symptoms. Exercise, relaxation and stress-reduction measures also may help."*

**Mayo Clinic, 2021, <<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/fibromyalgia/symptoms-causes/syc-20354780>*

2. Client

The client in this study was Janet, a female aged 57 who was working full time in a school. Her health was concerning to her as she experienced pain and discomfort on a daily basis. Treatments by a range of specialists had not been helpful. The issues she presented with included:

- An arthritic style of pain on the right side of the body, notably the foot, knee, hip, spine, wrist and thumb, and also in the left hand. A chest x-ray taken in a hospital emergency department led to an initial diagnosis of Diffuse Idiopathic Skeletal Hyperostosis (DISH). This was followed by treatment over several years by a rheumatologist, before being referred back to the client's GP with the revised conclusion of fibromyalgia.
- Bowel inflammation. A gastro specialist was helpful in giving Janet information and guidance to help understand and manage bowel inflammation.
- Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD, suspected but not diagnosed).
- Family history of Attention Deficit Disorder. Not tested but client believed she may have it. Memory concerns; often forgetful halfway through a sentence.

To mitigate pain, Janet occasionally took Panadol and Codeine as needed. She preferred to avoid taking strong pharmaceutical medications.

3. The treatments

We agreed to a program of eight weekly treatments, using classic reflexology (Ingham) on the feet.

Eight treatments were given weekly, each Friday. Observations, changes in stress levels, symptoms and sleep were measured using a Visual Analogue Scale. The ten point scale used was a linear measurement, with 10 indicating symptom unbearable and 1 as no pain.

4. Program Results

4.1 Stress

Janet's stress levels were measured at four times during each week: before the treatment; at the end of the treatment; the day after the treatment; and three days after the treatment.

The most significant drop was experienced in week one, when her stress level measured at its highest as an 8 at the start of treatment. It was 1 by the end of treatment, rising to a 2 the next day and falling to 1 on day 3.

Her stress levels then remained notably low for much of the eight week period, with the exception of weeks 6 and 7, when a 5 and 4 were experienced at the start of treatment, falling to 1 at the end of each treatment.

At the program's end, her stress level was 0 – no stress indicated.

4.2 Sleeping

Janet's sleep quality on the night after each treatment improved. Four out of the eight weeks gave her a better sleep outcome on the night of the treatment, two were the same 'as normal' and only one was 'worse than normal'. In her observations at the end of the program, Janet listed improved sleep as one of the significant outcomes.

4.3 Pain

Pain levels improved consistently throughout the program, ending at relatively low levels.

Weeks 1 and 2 started at levels of 6 and 4, falling to 2 at the treatment's end. In the first week, that improvement was sustained, although in week 2 it did rise to 5 after some vigorous walking.

In weeks 3 and 4, pain remained at low levels of 1 and 2, and pleasingly she registered no pain (0) for the first time at the end of treatment in week 3.

Week 5 results were initially positive, but rose to 8. Janet saw a GP and was diagnosed with a pinched nerve in her back, requiring prescription pain relief.

Week 6 started a little higher at 6, but post treatment was back to 2 and retained levels of 1 or 2 for the remainder of the week.

In week 7, Janet was battling nausea, cause unknown. Pain was absent but nausea was a troubling feature of the week. It eventually cleared.

In the final week of the program, Janet reported no pain on the day of treatment, and this rose to 1 during the week.

4.4 Bowel discomfort

Although the program did not specifically measure bowel disturbances, Janet reported an almost instant improvement from week 1. At the start of program she was needing to empty her bowel up to eight times daily. By the end of the program this had decreased to just several times a day.

5. Client Observations

Janet made the following observations:

- Huge reduction in pain to spine, hip, knee, toes and thumb.
- Sleeping has improved significantly.
- Some positive changes to bowel and stomach.

"I've had the best sleep I've had in five or more years."

6. Conclusion

Although this is a simple case study of one person, it is evident that reflexology may help relieve pain, stress, and symptoms of fibromyalgia.