

Path to Better Health

Reflexology footpaths allow you to saunter your way to greater well-being.

It is possible to experience reflexology—which involves rubbing specific energy points on the feet,

each associated with a different organ or body system—without making an appointment. Reflexology footpaths made from a series of stones, some thick and round and others narrow and laid on their sides, are popping up in parks, spas and other public spaces.

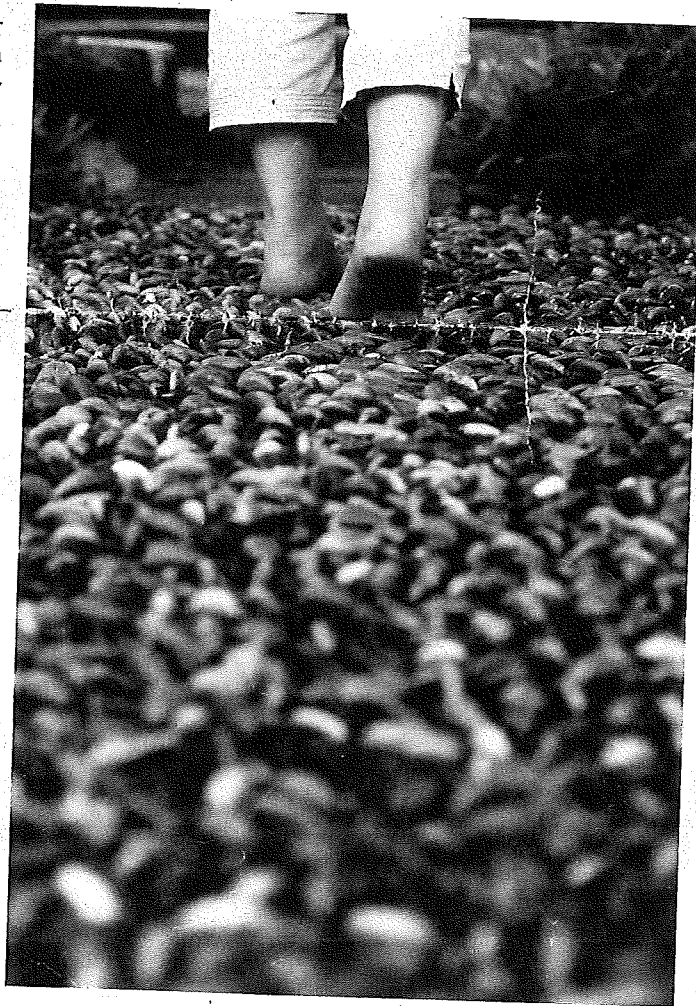
A walk along the stone footpaths is designed to stimulate the feet's reflex points, leading to health benefits such as increased blood circulation, enhanced digestion, improved balance, pain relief and stress reduction.

"The paths are great to walk on," says Lila Mueller, a board certified reflexologist in Wisconsin and recording secretary for the Reflexology Association of America (www.reflexology-usa.org). "It's like a mini reflexology session in the park."

A New Trend

While the paths have been popular in Asia for decades, the concept is just starting to catch on in the US. A growing interest in alternative therapies coupled with research that supports the benefits of reflexology has led to the construction of reflexol-

ogy footpaths in parks, healthcare facilities and spas, and on college campuses, across the country. They range from 12 to more than 60 feet, arranged in circles and other shapes.



In addition to offering some of the health benefits associated with a traditional reflexology session, the outdoor paths provide a connection with nature and an accessible opportunity for regular self-care.

"We see a lot of people taking off their shoes and walking on the paths," says Jessica Emerson, business development and partnership manager for King County Parks in Washington

State. "Some people include the paths as a form of morning meditation and others use them to relax after their workouts."

The parks department installed reflexology footpaths at three locations—Marymoor Park, White Center Heights Park and Steve Cox Memorial Park—in 2007. A licensed reflexologist designed the paths and the installations have attracted a lot of attention.

"The paths are pretty unique in America," Emerson says. "A lot of people had never seen [the paths] before and had no idea what they were for."

User Instructions

To explain the concept, signs beside the county's paths describe their purpose along with instructions for how to use them. They advise walkers to go at their own pace, use the handrails for balance, take breaks if needed and drink plenty of water to wash away toxins.

If you've never walked on a reflexology footpath, Mueller suggests starting slowly. "If your energy flow is stagnant, it could be painful to walk the path," she says. "You should ease into it and never push past your pain tolerance."