

# Toe Yoga

## Exploring the benefits of flexible feet

### Why bother stretching toes?!

As long as we are not in pain we tend not to think about the important role feet play in our everyday lives. In my practice as a reflexologist and as a yoga teacher I have noticed how cramped and rigid many people's feet and ankles are. It's so important to maintain flexibility and mobility of the whole foot, including the toes and ankle as it determines to a large extent one's posture, gait and balance, all of which become more important the older we get.

Each foot has 26 bones which allows for a greater range of movement than many realise or utilise. Historically as ancient people walked barefoot over wild ground, the whole foot moulded to the terrain and was therefore constantly moving. These days we walk almost entirely on flat surfaces and in shoes, which tends to keep the foot as one fixed block. This encourages the ligaments to tighten and joints to stiffen. So to keep all your toes in good working order I have devised a short 'toe yoga' programme!

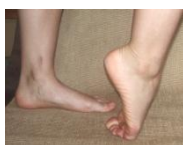
### How to keep mobile

These are little exercises that you can do either standing or sitting depending on your ability, inclination and location. They should only take 2 or 3 minutes to perform:

- Start by rotating the ankles, first clockwise then anti-clockwise
- Then come up onto tip-toes as high as you can (picture 1)
- Next, place the top of the toes on the floor so they are curled under, one foot at a time if you are standing! (picture 2)
- Place the feet flat on the floor and roll between the outer and inner edges of your feet (picture 3 & 4)
- Return the feet to a flat position and spread the toes as wide as possible (picture 5)
- Now the tricky bit!
  - a) lift just the big toes
  - b) move just the little toes
  - c) lift just the middle 3 toes.



1



2



3



4



5

NOTES: Don't be alarmed if there are a few clicks and cracks – it's very common. Please do not strain and don't continue anything that hurts.

## Benefits of toe yoga

The benefits of increased flexibility

- Improved balance and stability
- Smoother gait and longer stride
- Greater range of movement
- Less prone to falling and/or twisting ankles

Other foot benefits include

- Improved circulation
- Reduced water retention
- Better bone alignment
- Healthier skin

## Other footcare basics

Our poor feet are often neglected and sometimes reviled! Hopefully you will now be inspired to give some love and appreciation to these hardworking, ingenious and important part of our bodies. Here's a quick check list as a reminder of some simple foot care rules:

- keep feet warm dry and comfortable as much as possible
- walk barefoot where possible and safe
- use a pumice or similar to slough off dead skin (don't use blades to remove skin)
- moisturise dry areas (and a little massage at the same time wouldn't go amis!)
- check between the toes for infection/cuts
- tea tree oil/cream is a good anti fungal, anti-bacterial