

The Natural Health Centre has been helping people deal with emotional and health issues for nearly 30 years. Anna Williams tried out a complementary therapy for herself...

Tucked away in Radbrook Green, Shrewsbury, the Natural Health Centre is a calm oasis where a team of 30 experienced therapists offer complementary treatments including acupuncture, massage, hypnotherapy, counselling and herbal medicine. A team of osteopaths and chiropractors are on hand to deal with structural problems, and one of the UK's most experienced reflexologists, Simon Hooker, who has been practising for 34 years, helps people deal with a wide range of conditions.

I was given the opportunity to sample reflexology for myself, and it's safe to say I am a convert. Being a relatively healthy, active person means I have happily never really had any long-term illness or conditions. Reflexology, a treatment that originated in the Middle-East around 5,000 years ago, can benefit many types of complaints, both physical and mental, by using pressure points on the feet to stimulate specific areas of the body.

When I met Simon he explained that people of all ages and of varying health, use his services, alongside those of the wider Natural Health Centre.

With more than 60 years of professional practice between them the three partners – Simon, chiropractor David Dykes, and psychologist Loraine Newbold have taken the practice up from a four room starting point to a centre of excellence that now has eight treatment rooms, and is open six days a week with evening appointments available.

Since opening in 1990 over 24,000 people from Shropshire and Mid-Wales have used the service, with many becoming regular visitors to the centre.

Reflexology in particular is popular as an aid for hormone related issues including fertility and pregnancy, PTSD, skin complaints, immune-deficiency concerns, and other problems.

As I had nothing specific to treat I was given an hour long foot work-out which felt much like a wonderfully relaxing MOT. Sitting comfortably on a couch, my feet were given a gentle workout by Simon who established that alongside general hormonal tenderness (which most women of child-bearing age would have) I also had a tender point at the end of my second toe on the right foot – linked to my sinuses. Not two weeks previously I suffered from a bout of sinusitis which I instinctively went to see my GP about and was given antibiotics.

Simon was keen to stress that all of the complementary therapies offered at the Natural Health Centre are exactly that. They complement Western medicine practices and he would urge people to always visit their Doctor as well. A large number of NHS professionals refer their patients on to the Centre, as well as using the services themselves.

Reflexology professionals are unable to make claims about what the treatment can do to heal or cure people but Simon said it has been proven to increase the volume of oxygen in the blood, and the body's immunity to certain infections. He has personally seen some very good results working with children who suffer from recurrent infections.

It is accepted that in theory the holistic approach of reflexology can help with anything because it just gets the body to work better. It restores and promotes health.

Simon said it has proven particularly useful in pregnancy, from conception through to morning sickness, aches and pains associated with pregnancy, inducing labour at full term, and dealing with hormonal imbalances after birth. Simon has worked with more than 600 women in various stages of pregnancy throughout his career.

Apart from my sinuses and hormones the only other area of concern that my feet revealed was a troubled left shoulder which I had recently noted after sleeping in an uncomfortable position one night.

Other than that, Simon was pleased to report that there was nothing unduly concerning going on in my body – which was good to hear!

People visit Simon and his colleagues at the Natural Health Centre for a one-off reason, or for longer-term management of their condition. Those like me who don't have any particular health problems can choose to use reflexology for its relaxing effects. It's true to say that I was certainly calm and smiling for the rest of the day.

I have already recommended the centre and reflexology to my husband – for ongoing back problems – and a friend whose nine-year-old daughter has an extreme case of eczema that none of the traditional lotions and potions on offer can shift.

To find out more about the work of the Natural Health Centre and to make an appointment call one of the friendly reception staff on 01743 248878.