

## **Reflexology and the Autoharper**

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Autoharp players are like athletes – our craft involves highly precise, controlled, repetitive muscle movements. And, like athletes, autoharp players often suffer from mechanical wear-and-tear injuries to our bodies that can make our favorite pastime painful or even impossible.

A long practice session can leave us with cramps and soreness that may require a long recovery period. Some of us (like the author) may be recovering from a hand injury that complicates the recovery process. Many autoharp players are seeking ways to ease various aches and pains. Reflexology is one modality that may help us to overcome these issues.

The practice of what we now call “reflexology” is thought to have had its origins in ancient Egypt and was spread throughout the Roman Empire. The precursor to modern Reflexology began in 1917 with what was called “zone therapy.”

Developed by Dr. William Fitzgerald, the idea was to achieve pain relief through the application of pressure to specific areas (zones) of the body.

Dr. Fitzgerald discovered a very interesting fact, that the application of pressure on the zones not only relieved pain but in the majority of cases also relieved the underlying cause as well. The same result is experienced through reflexology today, which is based partially on the zone theory.

Reflexology works in a manner similar to (but different from) massage – the application of repetitive pressure to parts of the body tends to relieve the effects of stress and tension. The stimulation of the nerves and the breakdown of congested or restricted tissue aids in healing. The repetitive motion also tends to rebalance blood flow and may aid in the redistribution of restricted fluids in the muscles and joints.

I first met Michael St. Amour’s brother Luc as a carpenter during our kitchen-remodeling project several years ago. Recently, Mike came to our house to finish up a few details of that project.

I learned about his experience as a practitioner of Reflexology only when my wife, Lynda, gifted me with one of Mike’s hand rollers as a Valentine’s Day present. Even though I tend to be skeptical of “alternative medicine,” I tried it, and I have to say it does work for me.

A minute or two with hand the roller provides a nice warm-up before playing, and another few minutes cool-down relaxes the fatigue and cramping I often feel after a long practice session.

Mike began his study of reflexology in 1992, and became certified in 2004. Reflexology hand rollers were almost non-existent in the 90’s, so Mike began to develop his own designs. Mike went through dozens of prototypes trying to get a balance between shape, size, and function to be effective -- this one stays in your hands and fingers.

The current hand roller product is available in two sizes: medium (fits most women) and large (fits most men). They’re made in a choice of maple or cherry

(choose one to match your autoharp). Fancy laminated rollers (such as the ones shown in the pictures) are available. (Mike says that no two laminated rollers will be exactly the same – each is unique in its own way.) The following photograph illustrates Mike's range of hand roller products.



Photo 1

The following series of photographs illustrates the types of exercises that one can do with a hand roller.



Photo 2



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5