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chronicles of a spa junkie

# WORKING UNDER PRESSURE

**It's the end of a heavy week and our undercover columnist feels in need of an aesthetic - and energetic - pick-me-up. Will facial reflexology deliver?**

**F**acial reflexology is a relatively new treatment, and claims to be just as effective in face-saving as it is in treating your health. I'm eager to test the claim, as I rarely find therapies that truly straddle both categories. I was first introduced to what one journalist has called the "Better than Botox" reflexology facial lift by my gorgeous Swedish girlfriends, who swear by Paolo Lai at Neville Hair & Beauty. They tell me that his magic hands and jade rollers smooth out crow's feet, tighten the jaw and rid you of puffiness. Given the week I have had, of late nights and travelling, it sounds like just what I need before my dinner party tomorrow.

**SATURDAY, 10 AM**

Tomoyo - the terribly convenient, pops-over-to-your-apartment facial reflexologist, who's been lauded as "simply the bee's knees" by another

girlfriend - is here. I have been a fan of the foot version of reflexology for many years. But as the diminutive Tomoyo explains, taking off her shoes at my door, the results of facial reflexology can be much more dramatic.

"I have seen far better results working with pressure points on the face," she says. The reason, she explains, is quite simply the proximity of the brain and the central nervous system to this area. "Imagine that you are holding a remote control and pressing the buttons to change the channels, making things louder, softer, brighter. That's exactly what we are doing when we press on certain points on your face," she says. The face contains more than 500 of these nerve points; in a 50-minute session, Tomoyo selects a few of these to stimulate, tailoring the treatment according to the needs of each client.

It makes sense: the placement of all my sensory organs is just in front of the neuroanatomy of my brain. So facial reflexology is a much closer route to market. I begin to wonder why we have been messing about with the feet for so

long. Why did we not just to cut the chase and start with the face 5,000 years ago?

Tomoyo is a disciple of the Sorensensystem of facial reflexology, which is the dominant voice in this arena. Originally from Denmark, Lone Sorensen has trademarked her form of practice and trained up thousands of therapists the world over. Utilising the Oriental meridian system, she has incorporated key nervous-system pressure points and curated it all into 11 different treatment maps. This means her students have 11 different sequences with which to treat a client. Inspired by her work with the Mapuche Indians, a tribe in south-central Chile and southwestern Argentina, she calls these curing routes "Mapuche maps".

Tomoyo offers a variety of different treatments, seven of which incorporate facial reflexology techniques. The first one I try is called Cosmo Japanese Face Lifting, which works on your energy meridians, reflex zones and nerve points, to help stimulate, drain and detox the lymphatic system. It also helps to stretch and tone the muscles, creating that lifting effect. The treatment starts with the activation of the lymph system. Tomoyo lightly pumps on my chest with her hands, and, using organic rosehip oil, pushes on points on my chin, along the jaw line, up to my ears and around my eyes; she repeats this a few times, triggering the release of endorphins and serotonin in my body. Just as with foot reflexology, each point relates to a certain organ in the body.

Then she starts work on the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems; she balances these by repeatedly making a figure-eight movement on my forehead using her two middle fingers.

Then the usual spa-style facial cleansing and exfoliation begins. She moisturises with a rosehip ash lifting mask, then spends the remaining 30 minutes of the treatment massaging my face, making long and short strokes up and down with her fingers. "This is like aerobics for your face," she says. "The key goal here is draining and detoxing the lymphatic system and toning your muscles by giving them a good work-out." She picks up two cold salt balls, which she uses to massage around my face. These, she explains, are great for replacing salt in the skin, and the coldness is especially good for reducing puffiness around the eyes. The end result is a glowing look and reduced puffiness, with a lift in the jaw line and eye line; in a nutshell, it's like a few extra hours of sleep in a treatment.

#### 5PM THE FOLLOWING SUNDAY

Today, however, it's not aesthetics I crave; I need a seriously good pick-me-up therapy. I'm exhausted, and the thought of facing another deadline-heavy week tomorrow morning is almost too



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sluggishness through the manipulation of 35 acu-points on my face.

"Don't worry if you fall asleep, and don't be embarrassed if you snore; almost all of my female clients do, despite their protestations that they never would," she says sweetly as she starts the treatment.

She begins with gentle pushing and rotating movements on my chin, and then gradually works her way up and around my face. The principles are very similar to the Cosmo Japanese Face Lifting therapy, the main difference being that the points she works on today are more focused on specific organs and hormone points to help invigorate my battle-weary body. "This is a holistic healing treatment," she reminds me.

Using a variety of thumb pushing and three-finger, pincer-like movements, she is not only stimulating my kidney, liver and spleen – apparently, the root cause of my malaise – but she is also helping to release the muscles that get tense from everyday actions such as talking, laughing and teeth grinding. She targets the jaw,

From top: Tomoyo uses salt balls to reduce puffiness. Manipulating points on the jaw.

where my spleen and small intestine meridians are located; she pushes the points below and above my ears, which are hormonal; and she also focuses on my colon (which has been sluggish from all the travel), the corresponding point for which is found at the midpoint of the lateral border of the nostril.

The finger strokes and reflex stimulation do feel different to the Cosmo Japanese Face Lifting; on occasion I can feel a tenderness in certain areas. Tomoyo explains as I comment on these, "That's a stress-related point; that's the stomach; the kidney..." – ouch! – "and yes, that's your spleen talking to you right now." By the time we are done, I feel my energy levels have returned and my mood has notably improved. I slug down a few glasses of water on Tomoyo's recommendation.

#### BOTTOM LINE

Both treatments are effective; both times I felt and looked better, which is not surprising as the treatments are made up of similar steps; and both work on your energy and your muscle tone.

After the Cosmo Japanese Face Lifting, there was a notable aesthetic improvement: I saw a lifting from the cheekbone upwards, while the saggy skin around my jaw line seemed firmer. An hour of massage using oil also made the skin look smoother and younger. The effects of this treatment lasted for a few days. The second treatment, of pure facial reflexology, was more holistic

and focused on healing. Afterwards, I had more energy and generally felt better for a few days, my skin tone was improved from the "work-out" it got, and my face looked fresher. I can genuinely see the merit of this style of reflexology; I felt the

positive influence of the treatments faster, and they seemed to improve my low-energy symptoms almost instantly. The next time that I need to look better than I feel, I will do 45 minutes of healing facial reflexology, then add another 30 minutes of Cosmo Japanese Face Lifting, so that I'm fixed from the inside out. These treatments do what they say on the tin – whichever one you plump for first. ♦

Spa Junkie pays for all her own travel, treatments and accommodation. Tomoyo Nozaki, Keet Clinic, Central London College of Reflexology, 62-70 Shorts Gardens, Covent Garden, London, WC2 (07900-418 893; [www.theenergy.space.com](http://www.theenergy.space.com)); one hour of facial reflexology costs £45; Cosmo Japanese Face Lifting costs £60 for one hour. Mobile surcharges for home visits cost from £50.



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