

Stirring tunes ease Parkinson's

Walking while listening to rousing music may ease some of the symptoms of Parkinson's disease, according to research, writes Roger Dobson.

Patients who listened to music on an iPod during a 30-minute walk three times a week for 13 weeks improved their walking and the severity of their movement symptoms diminished after treatment, suggesting long-term benefits.

'Our findings show that patients who trained with a music programme improved their gait and other factors,'

says Dr Lesley Brown, who led the study at the University of Lethbridge, Canada. 'This is the first study to demonstrate that music listening can be safely implemented among Parkinson's disease patients during exercises.'

Parkinson's disease affects about 120,000 people in the UK, most of whom are over 50. Sufferers do not have enough of the brain chemical dopamine, which is involved in movement. The main symptoms are tremor or shaking, slowness of movement and rigidity.

In the study, 30-minute playlists of stirring tunes were developed for each patient, based on individual choices. The tempo was matched to the preferred walking speeds of each person.

Those who had music therapy had a significant increase in walking speed and a reduction in stride time. There was also improvement in motor symptom severity after 13 weeks.

Just how the music works to have such an effect is not clear, but it is known that carrying out two tasks at the same time can improve co-ordination skills.

By **Annabel Venning**

Stress, insomnia, digestive problems, joint pain, menopausal flushes and memory loss: all of these are common conditions that can be hard to treat, leaving sufferers in despair.

Some turn to complementary therapies such as reflexology, which works by stimulating pressure points on the feet that correspond with particular parts of the body.

An estimated 35,000 reflexologists are now practising in Britain and a growing number are now using the face, rather than the feet or hands, to deliver this health therapy.

According to its advocates, facial reflexology is effective because the face has a large number of nerves and blood vessels.

Facial reflexology combines massage with theories based on acupuncture and Chinese concepts of energy lines, or meridians.

According to Chinese medicine, our energy flows through the body via 12 invisible meridians. If these energy lines become blocked, imbalances occur, and this imbalance can result in aches, pains, insomnia and even irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Facial reflexologists say they can feel a change of texture as a result of these 'imbalances' under the upper layer of skin on the face. They are said to feel like lumps of porridge or grains of sand.

By working over the face (excluding the eyelids) with the fingertips, they can, they claim, break down these deposits, boosting the energy, circulatory and nervous systems.

'The brain is the control centre of the body and the face is much closer to it than the feet are, so face reflexology can work faster than foot reflexology,' says leading facial reflexology practitioner Nikke Ariff.

Ms Ariff, who has a clinic in London, explains that each session begins by stimulating the acupuncture points on the face using acupressure (pressing on them with the fingertips and rotating them on the spot). As well as being 'energy points' they are, according to Ms Ariff, important blood circulation and nerve supply areas.

She warms the face and corresponding body areas, releasing muscle tension and allowing more blood to flow through. The theory is that the face is a micromap of the body so, by working on a particular point of the micromap, you can affect the corresponding body part, calming it if there is inflammation or stimulating it if there is sluggishness.

The reflexologist uses the fingertips to make deep, sweeping massage movements or short, fast strokes. Sessions last for 45 to 50 minutes.

Ms Ariff says: 'The treatment relaxes the entire body, and when the body relaxes, you start to heal. It's no longer putting all its energy into stress.'

Often clients are so relaxed by the therapy that they drift off into a dreamy state that some describe as being like 'going under'.

The treatment is popular with those suffering from conditions that may be stress-related such as insomnia, tension headaches and IBS.

In some IBS patients, for example, there is a strong link between stress and symptoms, especially constipation. If stress can be alleviated, gut symptoms such as constipation can be alleviated too.

Although IBS is normally treated through changes to



'A weird sensation but it was amazing'

Dr Carolyn Goh, 32, above, is married and lives in London. She has a PhD in bioengineering and a medical degree and is currently undertaking research into stroke pathways and heart attacks at Imperial College London.

She has had one session of facial reflexology. She says: 'Because of my research into how messages travel around the body, I was very interested to give it a try and see how it might work. I felt the whole experience was very relaxing. I had a lot of tension in my shoulders and neck, but four or five hours after the treatment I felt lighter, my neck was freed up and my shoulders loosened, even though the therapist had not touched them.'

'My treatment lasted 45 minutes but it felt like five because I must have totally zoned out. At the end, my face felt almost numb. It was a weird sensation but amazing. I would definitely have it again.'

David Burrows, 41, a marketing consultant, lives in London with his wife Judith and their two boys, aged six and three.

He began having facial reflexology four months ago. David says: 'About 18 months ago I was feeling very run-down and stressed. Tests revealed my adrenal glands were not functioning properly.'

'Then Judith suggested facial reflexology. I gave it a try and it was incredibly relaxing, far more so than foot reflexology. That night I slept deeply for the first time in ages. I now have it every three weeks and after each treatment I sleep very deeply.'

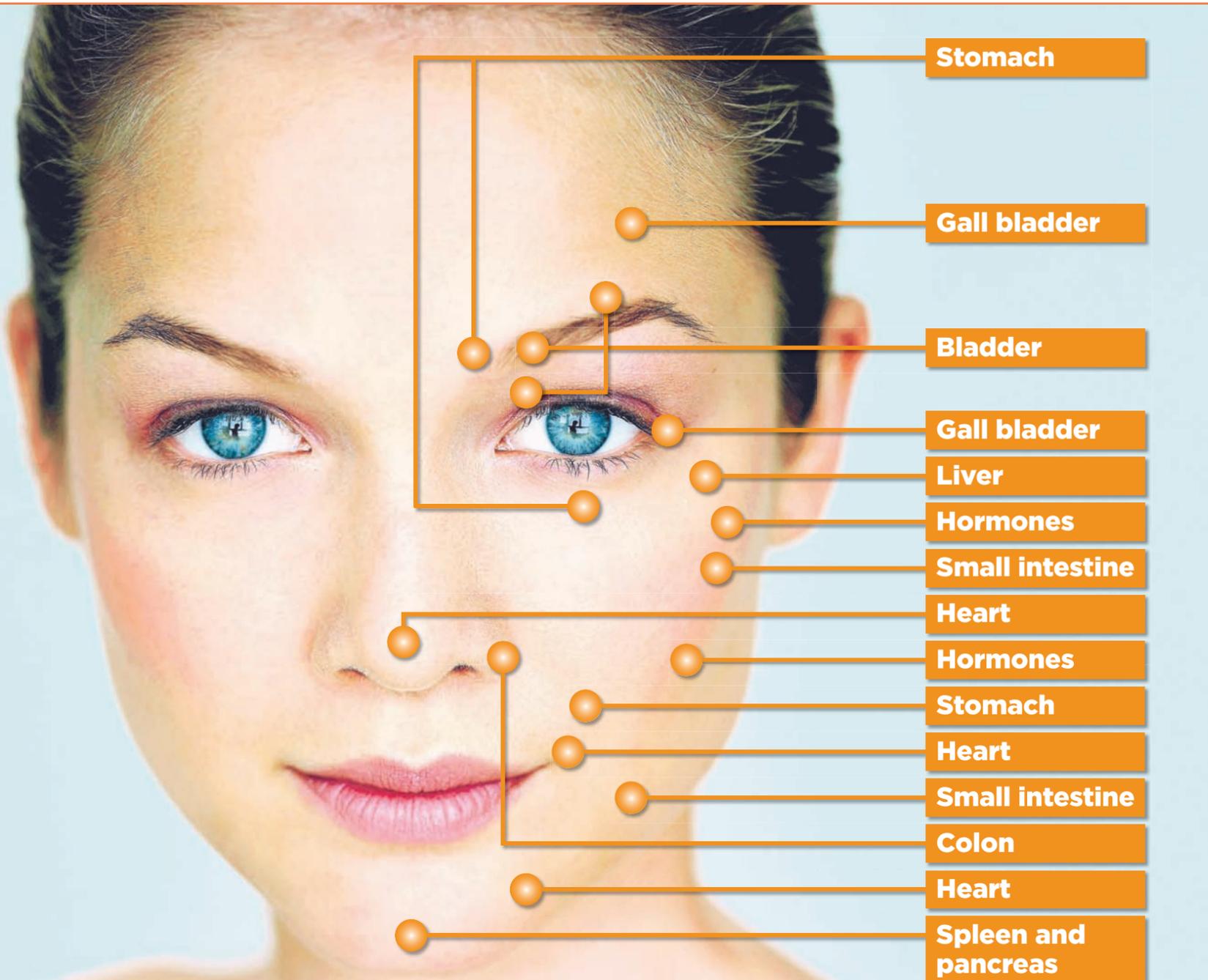
diet and, if necessary, medication to alleviate abdominal pain and constipation or diarrhoea, there are those for whom such treatments do not work or who are reluctant to stick to them, and for whom reflexology may provide relief.

The medical director of digestive diseases charity Core, Dr Anton Emmanuel, also consultant gastroenterologist at University College London, cites a study in which constipated patients

DOCTOR DOCTOR

Q Can you catch flu from someone who has had the flu jab?

A No – there is no active virus in the flu vaccine so it is not possible to pass on infection from it.



Backache, heartburn, insomnia, bad sinuses? Why a growing number of reflexologists are saying ...

Don't pop a pill, press your face

received reflexology and bowel behaviour was monitored.

In 18 out of 19 patients, not only did they feel less stressed, their bowel movements became more normal. Dr Emmanuel believes that the effects of reflexology on IBS-sufferers are about more than relaxation. 'I think it may have an effect on the nervous system. Pain is perceptual: any intervention to alleviate pain has to work on the brain and the nervous system.'

'It's plausible that reflexology could do something to the brain's reflex control of the gut and how pain is processed, in a way that is comparable with how conventional IBS treatments work.'

There are others, however, who

remain sceptical that reflexology is anything more than massage. David Colquhoun, Professor of Pharmacology at University College, London, says that while facial reflexology may be relaxing, any claims of a nerve connection between the face and other parts of the body such as the pancreas are 'purely invented'.

Yet its fans report that not only does facial reflexology alleviate specific symptoms, it improves overall health and emotional wellbeing. As Ms Ariff explains: 'It is a holistic therapy so it addresses the whole body, not just the specific problem, which is why we work on the whole face.'

● www.facialreflexology.com

NOW TRY IT YOURSELF

According to reflexology theory, specific points on the face are connected via meridian lines (energy lines) that run throughout the body connecting systems and organs. Each point is mirrored on the other half of the face.

A facial reflexologist is an expert in manipulating these points – which correspond to acupuncture points in Chinese medicine – and using other massage-like strokes. These points can be used to treat such localised symptoms as tension headaches or sinus problems.

There are some simple steps you

can take which may help alleviate some common conditions. Press fingertips softly on one pair at a time, circling gently without lifting fingers. Circle slowly eight to ten times.

BACKACHE: Press and circle all three bladder points.

HEARTBURN: Press and circle all three stomach points and small intestine point.

SINUSITIS: Press and circle colon, stomach, bladder and gall bladder points.

● Any persistent symptoms should be reported to your GP.

Statins could prevent colon cancer

Statins are among the most commonly prescribed drugs, taken by one in three British adults over 45 to protect against heart disease.

Now it seems that the cholesterol-lowering medicines may have an unexpected benefit – reducing patients' chances of developing colon cancer.

A new study from the University of Michigan is the first to conclusively prove taking statin drugs may lower the risk of the killer disease by 12 per cent.

About 106 new cases of colorectal cancer are diagnosed each day in the UK.

The review, presented last month at the American College of Gastroenterology meeting in San Antonio, Texas, is known as a meta-analysis, combining the findings of 22 scientific studies with more than 2.5 million volunteers.

Dr Jewel Samadder, who led the analysis, noted that the length of statin use, both greater than six months and more than five years, was associated with reduction in colorectal cancer risk. The drugs are able to block the action of a chemical in the liver that is necessary for making cholesterol.

Although cholesterol is necessary for normal cell and body function, very high levels of it can lead to atherosclerosis, a condition where cholesterol-containing plaques build up in arteries and block blood flow.

By reducing blood cholesterol levels, statins lower the risk of chest pain (angina), heart attack, and stroke.

A number of observational studies have suggested that long-term use of statins is associated with reduced risk of several cancers, including breast, prostate and lung.

'Our findings suggest statins really do protect against colon cancer,' says Dr Samadder.

But statins are not risk-free. In May, researchers reported that patients taking them have a higher risks of liver dysfunction, kidney failure, muscle weakness and cataracts.

A spokesperson for Cancer Research UK said: 'Studies looking at whether statins could help prevent bowel cancer had mixed results and only large clinical trials can tell us whether they can make a difference.'

'You can reduce your risk of bowel cancer by keeping a healthy weight, being physically active, cutting down on alcohol and eating a diet high in fibre and low in red and processed meat.'

