

Healing through acupressure

There are certain things that we cannot avoid in life, like recurring colds, excruciating headaches and sudden outbursts of anger. My mother, who is a tad antiquated, has always been a believer of alternative methods of healing. She used to take the palms of our hand and pressed certain points around. Strangely, as we grew older, our allergies paid fewer visits, our heads barely hurt that bad and we almost learned how to manage our temper. Her secret? Acupressure!

It is a traditional Chinese form of medical therapy which has been practised for thousands of years. Very similar to acupuncture -- which uses needles instead -- acupressure deals with the similar pressure points known as acupuncture points. These points are aligned along the pathways or channels in our body through which flows vital energy. These create a network for communication among our various organs. So, when these channels are blocked or imbalanced, we feel pain and discomfort.

When the acupuncture points are stimulated, (especially the ones located in the palms of our hands and soles of our feet) it signals the brain to release the

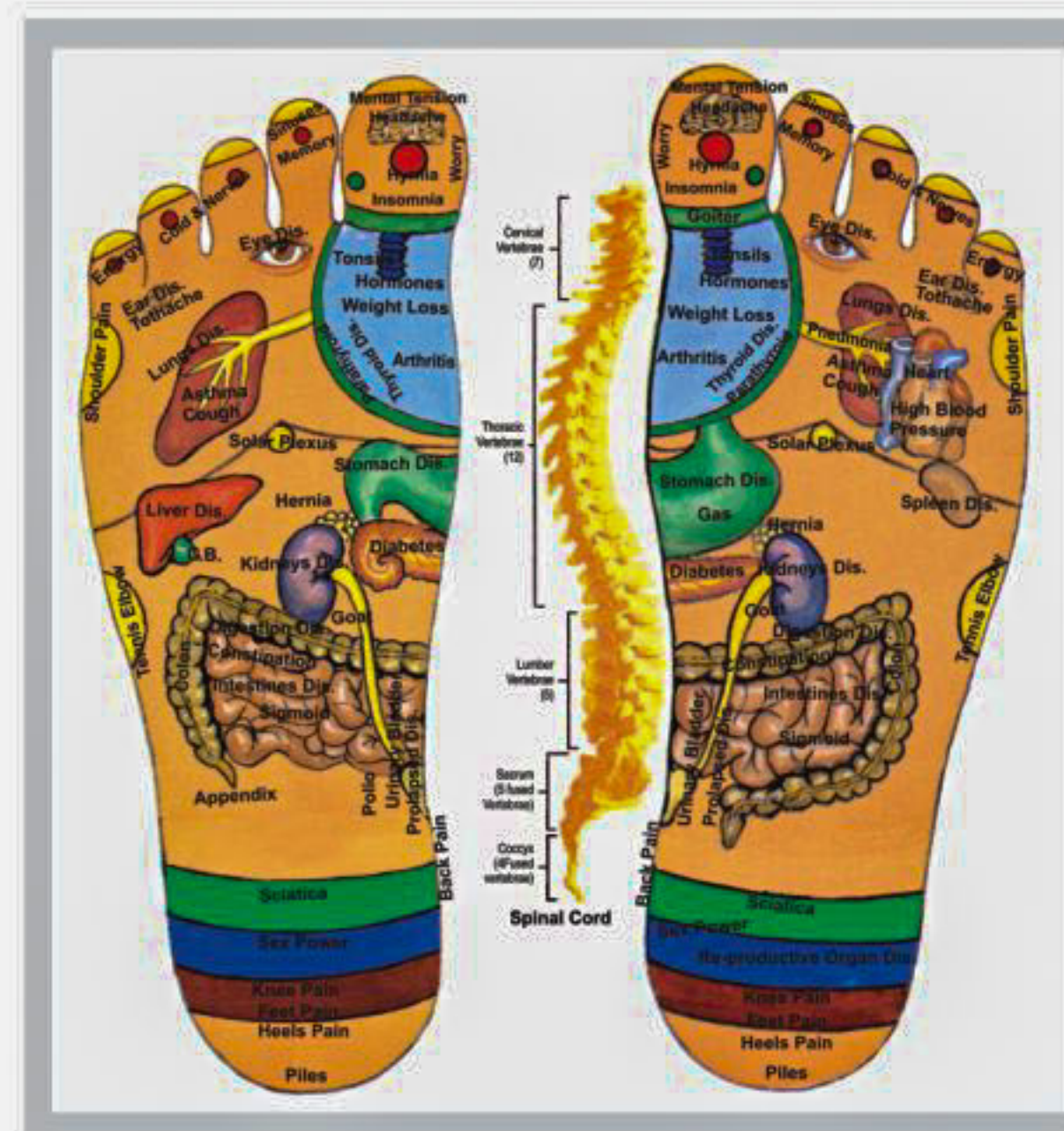
hormone endorphin, which acts as a natural pain reliever. All you need is a book to map the points and three simple steps:

Sit in a relaxed position and be patient.

The pressure points are to be pressed firmly in circular movements or using up and down strokes using the thumb and the index finger. Devices made for this purpose can also be used.

The points should have pressure applied for a few seconds up to a couple of minutes and then released. Take slow and deep breaths when the pressure is being applied.

Acupressure not only helps heal the body but also relieves the mind from emo-



tional distress. Pressurising certain points everyday can cure headaches, back pains, chronic fatigue, stress, insomnia, menstrual pains and stomach problems.

It also helps cure constipation, ulcers, high blood pressure, and kidney and thyroid problems. Stimulation of these points restores the flow of energy by sending the body to its natural state of wellbeing by boosting the immune system.

Sickness is inevitable and stress is unavoidable. The least we can do is stop popping aspirins whenever we have a headache or back pain. Instead, we should incorporate acupressure into our everyday habit.

By Mormee Mahtab

Ready – sweat – go!

Nowadays most gyms, hotels and fitness centres have built-in sauna and steam room facilities. They have a myriad of health benefits, so if you have not visited one yet, it's high time you put it in your bucket list.

There are many variations of the bathhouse, some of which date back to Ancient Roman times, but the word sauna stems from ancient Finnish, and refers to traditional Finnish bathhouses.

There's something intensely rustic about sitting in a small wooden room full of steam, fire and water. The idea does not sound appealing -- going into a room with other people to sit and sweat -- but it does have a lot of healing properties for the body.

Sweating out toxins is generally the main

benefit, however detoxification is not the only reason you should visit a sauna. Temperatures in a sauna are usually between 70 and 100 °C, and the heat causes the pores on the surface of your body to open and close effectively. It boosts circulation and perks up your immune system too, and is a good way to prevent the common cold.

Despite the heat and humidity in Bangladesh, we do not sweat all that much on a daily basis. Deep sweating has been proven to cleanse the skin, rinsing out bacteria and dead skin cells and unclog pores.

Deep sweating also promotes better circulation as the increased temperature means our blood vessels dilate, thus

increasing blood flow, which is also a good remedy for aches and pains.

The high heat in saunas aids muscle relaxation and reduces muscle tension, so it's always best to spend some time in a sauna room after a working out. It's crucial that, after a session in a sauna, you immediately shower with cold water, in order to fully reap the benefits. Your pores will close back up and blood will return to your vital organs and increase functionality.

If you are looking to lose weight, saunas are not a substitute for healthy eating and exercise, but they do help you burn calories, as the process of sweating requires our bodies to use up a considerable amount of energy. This, in addition to an increased heart rate, means you could be burning at

least 300 calories per session.

Sauna etiquette is important to remember as there is no general rule. Some are unisex, while others are for either just men or just women. Some saunas require you to wear some clothing, be it a swimsuit or a robe, while others allow you to wear just a towel.

They may not seem like the ideal place for a social gathering but you can often meet likeminded people as it provides a relaxing environment, closed off from the distractions and stress of the outside world.

Remember to stay hydrated throughout as you can become severely dehydrated if you do not replenish the liquids you lose.

By Zahrah Haider

Breaking the silence

Sometimes, when asked to introduce myself in front of a room full of people I just want to start by saying, "Hi, my name is Shejuti Islam and I am bipolar." While you can allow your mental illness, like bipolar disorder, to do little with the character you are, you can allow it to uphold your defining characteristics.

I could choose to listen to people who tell me that my problem is trivial, but who would I be helping by refusing to ascribe importance to a mental condition that governs my lifestyle on a regular basis?

I want to be open about my mental condition. I want to raise awareness about it within my family and friends, in classrooms and elsewhere. I want to be open about the way I sometimes experience manic episodes, have racing thoughts and generally have a lower sense of control over myself.

I also want to openly speak about the

divine connections I often feel, the creativity that flows out of me, even the suicidal thoughts that give birth to intimate pieces of literature or art without being labeled "insane" -- without being discriminated against and without having to feel shunned.

I don't want to do this alone because I know there are others like me with similar problems, with more unique characteristics that they are not comfortable expressing.

So how do we bring about this change? What people need to be told is that we need to start communicating. You, your mother and father, your boyfriend and your friends and even neighbours need to talk about mental health and illnesses just as frequently as you would talk about politics, the weather, Bollywood, cricket or the latest style statements.

The social stigma surrounding some-

thing that is so real needs to be removed. We need to play an active role in this matter instead of silently suffering, instead of letting society mould us into another one of its caricatures -- following norms and keeping quiet.

Instead of taking a back seat, you and I need to assume our responsibilities of generating an atmosphere in our homes and in our communities that would allow people to feel comfortable and at peace while talking about their problems. This is the least we owe to ourselves and each other.

By building an open environment, we increase the chances of mental illnesses being spotted and treated earlier. Maybe thus we will provide patients a real chance of chasing their dreams, maybe we will be able to prevent a suicide, and maybe we can help someone out of depression and

anxiety.

I want to tell you that your problems are real. The stress you face at work is real. General anxiety disorders, depression in children and mood swings are all real problems that you are battling every day. By acknowledging these challenges we can empower people. We can save them from worthlessness and self-loathing.

As someone who has suffered from severe mental illness for a long time, I want to assure you that facing your problems won't make them worse. You can start right from the comfort of your homes. You can start discussions with your mum, you can ignore the weird looks you get from her and you can offer words of advice to your younger brother. At the dinner table, you can announce that you are bipolar.

By Shejuti Islam