

Reflexology footnotes

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Oregon Study Confirms Health Benefits of Cobblestone Walking for Older Adults

By Kathryn Madden, ORI (reprinted with permission)

A recently completed study by scientists at the Oregon Research Institute (ORI) in Eugene confirmed earlier findings from a pilot study that walking on a cobblestone mat surface resulted in significant reductions in blood pressure and improvements in balance and physical performance among adults 60 and over. An article published in an early online publication of the Journal of the American Geriatrics Society summarizes the study results in a randomized trial.

"These are very exciting results," notes John Fisher, Ph.D., one of the lead scientists on the study. "Compared to conventional walking, the experience of walking on the river rock-like surface of these manufactured cobblestone mats improved participants' balance, measures of mobility, as well as reducing their blood pressure. These issues are highly important for preventing and delaying the onset of frailty among older adults, as well as helping them maintain their current health status."

Cobblestone-like walking paths are common in China. The activity is rooted in traditional Chinese medicine and relates to some of the principles of reflexology, in that the uneven surface of the cobblestones stimulate and regulate "acupoints" located on the soles of the feet. These acupoints are purportedly linked to all organs and tissues of the body. Although there is considerable anecdotal evidence indicating the health benefits of cobblestone walking, (e.g., pain relief, sleep enhancement, improved physical and mental well-being), until recently no controlled studies have been undertaken to scientifically evaluate its benefits and efficacy.

"We visited China and noticed that adults of all ages spent about 30 minutes each day walking, standing, and sometimes dancing on these beautifully laid paths of river stones in the parks and gardens of large cities. They did this for their health every day of the week. We used manufactured mats that replicated these cobblestone paths and developed a special protocol so that participants gradually got used to walking on the uneven surface of the mats," reported Fisher. Participants in the study, which was funded by the National Institute on Aging (Grant AG20470), were divided into an experimental group -- the cobblestone mat walkers -- and a control group which took part in conventional walking activities for one hour, three times per week for 16 weeks. At the end of the study, mat walkers were found to have better scores on measures of balance, physical function, and

blood pressure than those in the conventional walking group. This new physical activity could provide a different choice of physical activity that is therapeutic and health-enhancing and that can be done quickly and easily in the comfort of one's home.

Oregon research Institute, founded in 1960, is a non-profit behavioral research center with offices in Eugene and Portland, Oregon and Albuquerque, New Mexico. ORI is a nationally and internationally recognized research organization, committed to conducting behavioral research to improve the health of all citizens. Website: www.ori.org.

Note: Cobblestone walkway mats and ORI training program are available for purchase from Fitter First of Canada, TN: 1-800-Fitter-1 (348-8371) or on their website: <http://www.fitter1.com/cobblestone-mat.html>



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