“We now finally have the possibility of treating the cause for the problem rather than just the symptoms,” say researchers from the non-profit Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota. They have discovered the reason for most chronic sinusitis: an immune reaction to fungi. “It opens the doors to the first effective treatment for this most common chronic illness,” they say.

That allergy would be part of the picture probably isn’t a surprise to alternative therapists, but that it is an allergy to fungi is new knowledge. How can we use this knowledge? First of all we can inform our clients of the connection. This may help motivate them to make some lifestyle changes necessary to stabilize the immune system and avoid a reaction to the fungi. It’s a drawn-out process, but in the meantime we can lighten the symptoms with reflexology and give them some basic anti-inflammatory suggestions and helpful hints.

Where are the sinuses?
The sinuses are spaces in the facial skeleton placed around the nasal cavity. We have four sinuses: the maxillary and frontal sinuses are the biggest ones. The ethmoidal sinuses are smaller and lie in the bone tissue between the cavities of the nose and the eyes. The sphenoidal sinuses lie in the wall behind the nasal cavity.

All the sinuses are covered with a mucous membrane and have a drainage canal to the nasal cavity. It is believed that one of the functions of the sinuses is to warm and humidify the air we breathe in.

Figure 1: Placement of the sinuses
Pandehule = Frontal; Sibensceller = Ethmoidal; Kilebenshule = Sphenoidal; Kæbehule = Maxillary
Symptomatic treatment with reflexology
With acute pain it’s advisable to start by addressing the pain reflexes. Later on one can address the deeper connections. Most reflexologists have been taught where to find the sinus reflexes, but there can be a variation in the placement. Here is an updated placement.

Figure 2: Sinus reflexes as per Hanne Marquardt (1: Frontal, 2-3: other sinuses)

Behind the symptoms
Let’s revisit the research from the Mayo Clinic. Fungal growth was found in ninety six percent of all those tested, both in patients with chronic sinusitis and in healthy control persons. The difference was that those with chronic problems had a strong activation of eosinophils (a type of white blood cells), that give off toxins that kill fungi, but which also, in large quantities, irritate and damage the mucous membrane. The fungus type most of them reacted to was the Alternaria variety. Researchers have made some very elegant experiments where they have been able to video film single immune cells and show how the eosinophils attack the fungi in the patients with chronic sinusitis, whereas in healthy patients they simply “sniff” at the fungus without releasing toxins (fig 3).

Figure 3: High-resolution electron microscopy showing an eosinophil (green) in the process of attacking a runner from the Alternaria fungus (brown) with toxins (blue/violet). Artificially colored.

In progressive medical communities doctors have started to treat chronic sinusitis with anti-fungal remedies, but this of course is still only a symptomatic treatment. The optimal treatment will have to be tied in to why the immune system overreacts. Science still does not have an explanation for that, but this is where the holistic minded person comes in.
Treatment of the Immune system

Treating the immune system effectively will always be the basic treatment for chronic sinusitis and other chronic infections and inflammations in the body. Seventy to eighty percent of the immune cells are found in the intestines so be very aware of the condition of the intestines in your treatment and possibly suggest a supplement of lactic acid bacteria to aid the intestinal flora.

A sequence for a reflexology treatment might be to start with a couple of bi-weekly sessions, then follow up with monthly sessions until the immune system has recovered and the symptoms have disappeared.

Workshops

Learn more about reflexology techniques for the Immune System at the Touchpoint workshop in Hood River, OR  Oct. 4-5 2014.

See www.oregonreflexologynetwork.org for detailed information.

References


Mayo Clinic: www.mayo.edu

Touchpoint: www.touchpoint.dk

Helpful hints for sinusitis

- Flush the nasal cavities with salt water - 1 tsp salt in 1 1/4 cup water. Test the strength by dripping it into your eye, it should not sting.
- Inhale steam from thyme or Japanese peppermint oils.
- Massage the bones around the nose. Doing this activates acupressure points that act on the mucous membrane thus helping the drainage.
- Drink lots of water to thin the mucous.