

Can Reiki Help Your Chronic Pain?

This ancient Japanese touch therapy similar to massage has shown real results for managing chronic pain.

By Wyatt Myers

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The practice of Reiki sounds almost too good to be true. By "laying on hands" on specific parts of your body or even just positioning hands slightly above your body, a qualified Reiki practitioner can help bring relief to your chronic **pain** and make you feel better than you have in years. It is an ancient Japanese technique and a form of alternative medicine also sometimes referred to as a "biofield" therapy.

In **alternative medicine**, Reiki is a treatment in which healing energy is channeled from the practitioner to the patient to enhance energy and reduce stress, pain, and fatigue.

Practitioners say that it works by opening up a channel between healer and patient to transfer energy — a Reiki healer restores the body both physically and mentally.

During a Reiki session, muscles are relaxed, and energy flow is unblocked. This helps reduce physical tension and pain. Anxiety and stress also are reduced, helping to unblock and release

emotional pain. Although you may not be completely pain-free, you feel relaxed, refreshed, and better able to **cope** with your condition.

Reiki and Chronic Pain: What the Research Shows

Though **Reiki** may sound very "new-agey," the effectiveness of this ancient treatment has been shown in some studies. "A [recent] issue of the *International Journal of Behavioral Medicine* reviewed 66 clinical trials on biofield therapies," says Julie Kusiak, MA, a Reiki practitioner in the integrative medicine department at Beaumont Hospital in Royal Oak, Mich. The authors of the review concluded that there was strong evidence that biofield therapies help reduce the intensity of pain in general and moderate evidence that these therapies help reduce the intensity of pain for people who are hospitalized or who have cancer, Kusiak says.

In addition, Kusiak says, a separate review article of 24 studies also showed that touch therapies were successful in reducing pain. This review article noted that the studies involving Reiki therapy seemed to have the most success.

When Reiki is examined for its impact on more specific types of pain, the results seem to hold up equally well. "Recent studies on Reiki therapy reflect a broad spectrum of its benefit for pain relief," says Kusiak. "During colonoscopy, Reiki treatment resulted in decreased anxiety and pain. With abdominal hysterectomies, the women who had Reiki therapy both before and after their procedures experienced lower anxiety and pain.

Cancer patients being treated with Reiki reported lower fatigue, less pain, less anxiety, and better quality of life. And in a community of older adults, those who received Reiki therapy were documented to have reduced pain, anxiety, and depression."

Another plus about Reiki, adds Kusiak, is that it seems to be effective with very few side effects. "No serious side effects or risks have been identified in the medical literature on Reiki, and it is considered to be a very low-risk intervention," she says. "Since Reiki is facilitated either with a very light touch or with no touch — slightly off the body — it provides a therapeutic option for those who are in pain or unable to be touched."

Finding a Reiki Practitioner for Chronic Pain

If you're interested in finding a qualified practitioner of this alternative medicine, you can start by looking at Web sites such as [The International Center for Reiki Training](#) and [Reiki Masters](#). However, Kusiak points out that standardization of the practice of Reiki is lacking in the United States, so your best bet might be to get a good reference and do some research on potential practitioners that you might be interested in.

"National standards are lacking for Reiki and other biofield therapies, so a key factor to consider would be the practitioner's level of experience and training," she says. "Ask them if they have an understanding of and experience treating your particular health concern. With serious medical concerns, you may need a practitioner who is affiliated with an integrative medicine program. Finally, as with any therapy, one needs to feel comfortable with the practitioner."