

Reiki for the Health and Well-being of Your Rabbit

 rabbit.org/reiki-for-the-health-and-well-being-of-your-rabbit/

Reiki is a simple, safe, gentle, and powerful healing art that works on all four levels of the body: physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual. As with other energy work, Reiki seems impossible to describe in terms of the “how” of it, but it is effective in many situations. It promotes relaxation and healing by balancing our life force, the universal energy that animates us all. Reiki can also be used to balance emotional energy, as well as that of the chakras (energy centers, with specific purposes for the well-being of the body). While it may be best used in conjunction with medical treatment for physical ailments, Reiki has been known to heal on its own, targeting both the cause and the symptoms of an illness or injury.

Called by different names in different belief systems, Reiki itself never changes. The Japanese word *Reiki* means “universal life energy,” which permeates all living beings. Reiki is an ancient form of healing that makes use of this energy. Once attuned (opened to the energy flow), a Reiki practitioner is able to balance and/or activate the recipient’s physical state (constitutional energy), guiding it toward healing and well-being.

Reiki master Jeri Ryan, PhD, clinical psychologist as well as founder and board president of the Assisi International Animal Institute, provides a general overview:

This extremely pleasant, holistic method of healing is both powerful and flexible. It supports the body’s natural ability to release toxins and heal itself, revitalizes both body and soul, and re-establishes mental and spiritual equilibrium. Reiki balances and loosens blocked energy, which then becomes available to the recipient. Thus, it promotes a state of healing relaxation, which may be active or inactive.

While functioning on all levels, Reiki adjusts itself according to the individual needs of the recipient. For example, when balancing energy, Reiki will flow where it is needed in order to balance and help heal. When working on the chakras, the energy will spin in a circle and be distributed according to the individual chakra’s purpose and “blueprint.” In addition, the energy work has a positive intent, is delivered with love, and focuses complete attention on the rabbit – all of which have their own healing benefits.

Animal therapist Selke Eichler, PhD, who lives in Germany and shares her life with rabbits, elaborates further:

This universal life energy – the life force within us and our rabbits – can be weakened by illness or injury. Therefore, re-balancing and unblocking this energy helps patients in recovering their own strength, their own life energy. This, in turn, enhances the healing process.

It's important to recognize the significance of positive intention in this work. Reiki energy flows free through people who are calm, centered, and filled with egoless goodwill. To say it another way, it's important that the practitioner (beginner or advanced) clear out or establish distance from negative thoughts and emotions that are part of his or her personal experience. Then the healing Reiki energy can flow freely. Advanced practitioners more readily do this because they've become adept at clearing what they can from their own energy field and distancing themselves from the rest.

Being aware of and setting aside one's emotions are important when working with animals because they are so attuned to us. They pick up on our fear, anger, or other negative emotion and are likely to react to it (e.g., with agitation).

The healing art of Reiki has four levels, each building on the one below it. Level one is done with the hands – either by touching the recipient or by keeping the hands slightly off the physical body but within the energy body (or aura) of the rabbit. While this level is frequently used on humans, it's not always the best for rabbits and other animals because the initial energy shift, while gentle in itself, may be too much for a sensitive bunny. In addition, there may have been “bad touch” (including pain and/or abuse) in the animal's history, so residual fear is common. Reiki can address this fear. Dr. Ryan mentions:

A more expedient method of working with rabbits and other animals is to apply second-level Reiki, which can be done from a distance (e.g., across the room). Fear is less likely to come into play when the practitioner is a safe distance away – this is especially important if the Reiki practitioner is a stranger rather than the animal's person. Given rabbits' prey psyche, they are very likely to be afraid of someone unknown. Because in so many situations second-level Reiki makes the experience easier for the animal, I recommend that practitioners become attuned to both first and second levels. And sometimes it is best to start with several short Reiki sessions.

Levels three and four both require advanced training. Though all Reiki levels can work with dire illness or injury, each advanced level attunement activates a higher capacity for working with the recipient's energy.

Because rabbits stress easily, calming them is the first step. Perhaps your rabbit will respond to quiet music or maybe to light-touch strokes down the length of his body. It's ideal if the bunny is relaxed enough to sit in a favorite spot. (It's best that rabbits not be in a cage for the

Reiki treatment, as that is too captive an area.)

It is very important to respect the individual animal, minimizing stress and patiently accepting whatever the rabbit is willing to receive at that moment. A sensitive Reiki healer will change positions or temporarily back off, based on cues from the rabbit. The bunny should always be able to move away if feeling unsafe or threatened. Forcing the rabbit (or any animal) to stay and endure the treatment will not promote healing.

Caregivers who carefully observe their rabbits will know when they are uncomfortable. Each one reacts differently, so it's important to know what it means (for example) if the rabbit shifts positions or flattens her ears. A bunny should never be restrained, unless there is a medical emergency that requires such intervention.

It's usually quite easy to tell when a rabbit is accepting Reiki, as the bunny will appear relaxed and content. Dr. Eichler notes that rabbits tooth-purr when the healing work is done well, with the practitioner clear and filled with loving intention.

Reiki works well in conjunction with traditional veterinary care. When consulting with the veterinarian, get an understandable and complete picture (to the extent possible) of what is going on with the rabbit and what needs to change for healing to occur. Reiki healers "feel" the energy patterns and shifts in an animal's body. However, because Reiki practitioners do not diagnose problems, having information about which parts of the body are affected by the illness or injury as well as what has to change allows the Reiki practitioner to focus healing intention to those areas.

Dr. Ryan addresses this further:

Reiki's innate "intelligence" can work on those problems that are difficult to diagnose. The universal energy will go to the site(s) where it is most needed in the ill or injured body. For example, if a rabbit is not enjoying the company of her companions as usual (e.g., she distances herself), her third chakra, which has to do with confidence, may be out of balance. Though a Reiki practitioner may be informed of a problem, it's also very likely that the individual would feel the energy imbalance and be drawn to and focus the Reiki energy to the bunny's solar plexus. Another example would be with gastrointestinal issues: the practitioner would find him- or herself drawn to the abdominal area, with the Reiki energy flowing to the area with focus and intention.

Reiki master and teacher, Jay Burkard, who regularly uses the healing art to support and help heal humans as well as animals of various species, elaborates:

When speaking with someone who is not familiar with Reiki, I like to use the analogy of water. Like everything else in our universe, water is energy. So I describe Reiki as being like water flowing like a river to the areas that need it.

As a practitioner, I am simply the conduit through which the energy flows, and in that respect I “give” the Reiki to the rabbit. But in reality, the energy flows where it needs to go. For example, a rabbit’s leg might be injured, but some other energy center may need relief from blockage, which assists in the healing of the leg.

When a Reiki practitioner is highly attuned to the flow of energy, it’s possible for the practitioner to be “led” to the correct area that needs the Reiki. The entire body benefits.

Dr. Eichler offers her personal experience with the healing power of Reiki, which she used to treat her German giant, Donni.

In my country, the breed is primarily a “meat” animal, bred for fast growth (i.e., with a short-term lifespan in mind). Based on my discussions with reputable breeders, the overall health of the German giant is not a concern because most of the rabbits live less than a year. Those lucky enough to be rescued often present with skeletal and related issues, as did my Donni.



Giving Reiki to Donni on his hip chakra and root chakra. Photo by Selke Eichler.

At five years of age, he was an “old” rabbit, suffering from severe arthrosis. A large bunny, Donni weighed 8 kilograms [nearly 18 pounds], but he was not overweight. He’d been active in his younger years, but now he was suffering from debilitating joint deterioration and related pain.

Upon hearing the diagnosis – and the veterinarian’s prognosis that in a few months my beloved rabbit would no longer be able to hop – I immediately began giving Donni daily Reiki treatments. Focusing primarily on his hind legs, shoulders, and the root chakra (the area between the hips and the base of the spine), I continued those treatments on a regular basis. In addition, I supplemented his care with homeopathic treatment.

Donni’s response was positive – after two weeks he was hopping around again. He even managed to sit on his hind legs and turn his head to clean the fur on his spine, something he previously accomplished only by leaning against a support. Though his “old” age prevented him from being too sportive, Donni’s body moved easily and naturally, allowing him to live as a normal, healthy bunny for the next few years.



Giving Reiki to Donni on the soles of his feet to help support his legs. Photo by Selke Eichler.

Then came the day when he wasn’t able to hop freely anymore. The veterinarian surmised that Donni’s frame just would not support him anymore. So I assisted him in moving around and utilized pillows to help support his large body when he was in a prone position. The continued Reiki treatments kept Donni comfortable so that he did not need pain medication. Nor did he suffer from bed sores or lung problems, both of which could have resulted from his inability to move around as normal to relieve pressure on a particular area of his body.

With his rabbit friends and me in attendance, Donni died peacefully in his sleep, three full and joyous years after the initial diagnosis.

Additional Information

Individuals interested in further research about Reiki, including a deeper understanding of the four levels or finding a Reiki practitioner, will find some helpful information in the brief resource section below.

Consider researching and using alternative therapies as a wellness measure to prevent illness or, if your rabbit is already ill, to facilitate healing. Keep in mind a rabbit's low tolerance for pain and the potentially life-threatening problems that can quickly arise if pain and underlying issues are not treated in a timely manner. Consult with your veterinarian as necessary, discuss the diagnosis, and seek appropriate treatment. When your rabbit needs a veterinarian's help, alternative modalities can act as a complement to standard veterinary care.

Carefully select the professional who will provide care for your rabbit, reviewing training and qualifications. Consider also the condition of your rabbit as well as the physiology, nature, and needs of these small creatures. Be clear and realistic about your expectations and goals for treatment, which should prioritize your rabbit's comfort and quality of life.

Some Resources

There are many resources for individuals interested in researching and studying Reiki, including books by William Rand, David Jarrell, and Barbara Ray. Additionally, International Association of Reiki Professionals® (IARP) is a professional association of the global Reiki community. There are numerous works about other energy work, including balancing the chakras.

by Marie Mead with Jay Burkard, Selke Eichler, PhD, and Jeri Ryan, PhD

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Marie Mead has been involved in various capacities with animal rescue, advocacy, and education for over twenty years. She has made a home with special-needs rabbits and other animals, all of them rescues. Author (with collaborator Nancy LaRoche) of *Rabbits: Gentle*

Hearts, Valiant Spirits – Inspirational Stories of Rescue, Triumph, and Joy, Marie has also written rabbit-related stories and articles for other publications. Additional writings have covered topics such as aging and the environment.

Jay Burkard is a Reiki master and teacher who enjoys sharing his knowledge of the healing art. He has experience working with many species of animals, from parrots to horses. His work at Holyland Donkey Haven in Mt. Calvary, Wisconsin, is particularly meaningful because of the opportunity to regularly visit the facility. An accomplished musician and singer, he utilizes his music as another healing modality, and he uses his knowledge of rocks and minerals to create healing jewelry.

Selke Eichler, PhD, is an animal therapist, Reiki practitioner, and interspecies communicator who works with Divine Healing® and angelic energies; she also teaches meditation. A citizen of Germany, she actively participates in animal welfare organizations, focusing on rabbit care, general animal rescue, and the care of larger domestic animals. Dr. Eichler lives with rabbits, and she specializes in treating giant breeds and those with special needs.

Jeri Ryan, PhD, is a clinical psychologist with specialties in clinical hypnosis and mindful cognitive behavioral therapy. Her experience as a psychotherapist has nourished her work as an interspecies communicator, providing her with tools for psychological and emotional support of both the animals and their persons. She leads workshops in animal communication nationally and internationally. Dr. Ryan is founder and board president of Assisi International Animal Institute, a nonprofit education organization based in Oakland, California. The goal of the institute is to promote animals' well-being with a rightful, more respected and honored status amongst humans. www.assisianimals.org

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