

Reiki

Does It Fit with Naturopathic Medicine?



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Energy medicine comes in many forms, defined as anything that works on the energetic biofield of the human body, also known as the aura. Focusing on this aspect of health in turn has a ripple effect into other aspects including emotional, mental, physical, and even spiritual. I would like to focus this article specifically on reiki of the Usui origin. Reiki is an energy healing modality that came to us from Japan. The word reiki comes from two Japanese words; *rei* is divine energy and *ki* is personal energy. With reiki, there is a transfer of energy from the divine through the practitioner (not originating from the practitioner) to the person in need of healing. It basically looks like a laying-on of hands to various parts of the body while the patient is face up on a massage table in a relaxing environment. Is reiki naturopathic medicine? Technically, no. It is natural medicine, in the sense that we are working with the natural energy body and natural energies of the Universe, but naturopathic has a specific meaning. Naturopathic medicine specifically includes the modalities herbal medicine, homeopathy, diet and nutrition, physical medicine, hydrotherapy, and newer additions such as mind-body medicine, prevention and lifestyle coaching, hygiene, and more. There are some gray areas because although homeopathy is technically an energetic medicine since it works on the energy body, naturopathic medicine does not officially accept energy medicine under its umbrella.

So, what exactly can reiki heal? if we were to ask reiki practitioners and reiki masters, the answer would be that it is helpful with just about everything. It may or may not be “enough” to cure diseased states on its own, but one fact is that it does fully abide by the first



of six naturopathic tenets—first, do no harm. There is no harm whatsoever that can come from reiki. It is the gentlest of therapies. The only real negative side effect at all is that it can bring some buried emotions to the surface, which although unpleasant, can be necessary to free oneself fully from current maladies. The other five naturopathic tenets include the healing power of nature, identify and treat the causes, doctor as teacher, treat the whole person, and prevention as medicine. Reiki fits these as well since we are working with natural healing energies to correct disturbances in the energetic field which can be seen as treating the root cause, treating the whole person, as well as preventing future illnesses. Reiki practitioners are also teachers in that they are facilitators of these energies that willingly share what they know with the person on the receiving end.

Energy medicine is growing in acceptance and popularity today, even among those not necessarily “spiritually inclined.”^[1] Reputable medical facilities across the US are offering patients complementary and alternative healing programs such as reiki and are analyzing its effectiveness. Reiki education is offered free of charge in over 800 American hospitals today, as a means to accelerate healing and relieve pain.^[2] We know that naturopathic medicine has been steadily gaining ground, winning the acceptance of once strong critics. So how do these two play together? I guess it depends on who you ask. Stubborn warriors to the naturopathic cause may look the other way

[1] Insights West. *Canadians Want Alternative Medicine as Part of Health Care System*. Available from <https://insightswest.com/news/canadians-want-alternative-medicine-as-part-of-health-care-system/>. Posted 2016-05-03. Accessed 2019-09-18.

[2] Green Lotus. *Reiki Really Works - A Groundbreaking Scientific Study*. Archived at https://web.archive.org/web/20121005092828/http://greenlotus.hubpages.com/hub/Reiki_Really_Works-A_Groundbreaking_Scientific_Study.

or not pay energy medicine much mind. These people pride themselves on being evidence-based and are looking to integrate naturopathic medicine within conventional standards, not further isolate it. This is not to say there is no clinical evidence for energy medicine. It may be more difficult to test the effectiveness of it, but the same has been said about naturopathic medicine compared to pharmaceuticals. Although true, it can still be done.

The largest prospective reiki study to date—1,411 sessions conducted at Harvard University between 2015 and 2016—has recently been accepted for publication in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*.^[3] Statistically significant positive outcomes of moderate to large effect sizes ($p < 0.001$) were seen for all studied measures of psychological and physical health including pain, anxiety, depression, mood, tiredness, drowsiness, shortness of breath, nausea, appetite, and overall wellbeing. The results of this large-scale, multisite effectiveness trial indicate that even a single session of reiki can improve physical and psychological health.

In other studies, reiki was shown to be helpful for digestive disorders as well as hypertension, diabetes, ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, healing after surgery, and even Lyme disease.^[4] Reiki has been researched and suggested for dialysis ward patients, those in chemotherapy infusion labs, and those with HIV/AIDS.^{[5][6][7]} A multitude of studies have shown a statistically significant lowering of pain, both acute and chronic, after reiki treatment.^{[8][9][10]} According to Anthony Schifano of the National Fibromyalgia and Chronic Pain Association, reiki sessions have brought relief, total relaxation, less tense muscles, improvement in range of motion, and a sense of feeling balanced.^[11]



Many controlled studies have been submitted for peer review and to the Touchstone Process, a rigorous peer-review method designed specifically to analyze scientific reiki studies. Of these, 83% have shown moderate to strong evidence of reiki as a viable healing modality. The most common ailments it has shown effectiveness for include preoperative relaxation and postoperative pain, postoperative pain after tooth extraction, pain in chronically ill patients, depression, stress, cognition in the elderly related to dementia/Alzheimer's, and wellbeing in reiki practitioners themselves.^[12]

One proposed mechanism of action for reiki's widely reaching therapeutic benefit has been that it is a stress-management tool, and anything that lowers stress regularly will have a positive effect on overall health. Another has been that reiki gives one a sense of control, that there is something proactive that can be done for one's health aside from (or in conjunction with) perhaps less desirable and less empowering therapies such as medications. Another proposed explanation still is simply the placebo effect. This may be the case in certain instances but is largely discredited because reiki has been used successfully with animals and children.^[13] In

[3] Dyer, N.L., A.L. Baldwin, and W.L. Rand. "A Large-Scale Effectiveness Trial of Reiki for Physical and Psychological Health." *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, Vol. 25, No. 12 (2019): 1556–1162.

[4] International Association of Reiki Professionals (IARP). *Reiki Articles*. Available from <https://iarp.org/category/reiki-articles/>.

[5] Ferraresi, M., et al. "Reiki and related therapies in the dialysis ward: an evidence-based and ethical discussion to debate if these complementary and alternative medicines are welcomed or banned." *BMC Nephrology*, Vol. 14 (2013): 129.

[6] Birocco, N., et al. "The effects of Reiki therapy on pain and anxiety in patients attending a day oncology and infusion services unit." *American Journal of Hospice & Palliative Medicine*, Vol. 29, No. 4 (2011): 290–294.

[7] Morgan, V. "The feasibility of a holistic wellness program for HIV/AIDS patients residing in a voluntary inpatient treatment program." *Journal of Holistic Nursing*, Vol. 32, No. 1 (2013): 54–60.

[8] Baldwin, A.L., and N.L. Trent. "An Integrative Review of Scientific Evidence for Reconnective Healing." *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, Vol. 23, No. 8 (2017): 590–598.

[9] Anderson, J.G., and A.G. Taylor. "Biofield Therapies and Cancer Pain." *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2012): 43–48.

[10] Doran, B. "Reiki in the Clinical Setting." IARP website. Available from <https://iarp.org/reiki-clinical-setting/>.

[11] [No author listed.] "Reiki and Chronic Pain: Can Reiki Help Provide Comfort for the Chronic Pain Epidemic?" IARP website. Available from <https://iarp.org/reiki-and-chronic-pain-can-reiki-help-heathe-chronic-pain-epidemic/>.

[12] Green Lotus. *op. cit.*

[13] Kundu, A., et al. "Reiki Training for Caregivers of Hospitalized Pediatric Patients: A Pilot Program." *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*, Vol. 19, No. 1 (2013): 50–54.

2006 and 2008, stressed laboratory rats were given reiki as well as “sham reiki” as the placebo, and no treatment as the control. The genuine reiki group showed significant reductions in stress, anxiety, and depression responses. Indeed, reiki is a powerful stress-management technique. In 2015, it was shown that a five-month course to perform self-reiki could significantly lower stress levels among college students and maintain that relaxation over time as well.^[14] In a blinded pilot study at the Institute of Neurological Sciences at South Glasgow University Hospital, subjects received reiki from an experienced practitioner, a placebo consisting of an inexperienced person mimicking reiki, or no treatment at all. Subjects who received genuine reiki had statistically significant decreases in heart rate and diastolic blood pressure.^[15] Another study, performed at the School of Nursing at the University of Texas-Houston, measured statistically significant decreases in systolic blood pressure and anxiety, increases in salivary IgA indicating an immune response, and skin-temperature increases while electromyograph decreased, but those latter two were not significant.^[16] At New York Presbyterian Hospital/Columbia Campus was performed one of the first experiments on reiki and the autonomic nervous system response. Subjects were randomly given reiki, sham reiki, or nothing as the control. Only the reiki group showed significant reductions in heart rate, respiration, and systolic and diastolic blood pressure.^[17]

In a study published in the *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, reiki was shown to significantly impact autonomic activity in patients with acute coronary syndrome after a heart attack, which predicts recovery.^[18] Measured by continuous electrocardiography via a Holter monitor, reiki was shown to significantly increase high-frequency heart-

rate variability compared to nothing (control) or to relaxing music. In the same study, reiki significantly improved all positive emotions (happy, relaxed, calm) and decreased all negative emotions (stressed, frustrated, sad, angry, worried, scared, anxious). The (in)famous Dr. Oz, previously a cardiovascular surgeon, would invite Reiki practitioners to perform their craft on patients undergoing open-heart surgeries and heart transplants. He is quoted as saying “Reiki has become a sought-after healing art among patients and mainstream medical professionals.”^[19]

As for oncology, reiki was found to greatly alleviate chronic pain in patients at the Cross Cancer Institute in Edmonton, Canada, based on multiple measures including Likert scale and a visual analog scale.^[20] Numerous studies have shown a positive outcome with managing the side effects of chemotherapy and radiation, managing pain, anxiety, improving the immune response, and eliminating toxins.^{[21][22]} Even the American Cancer Society has recognized reiki as successful in refreshing the patient’s spirit; enhancing the sense of wellbeing; as well as decreasing nausea, vomiting, and the need for pain medication.^[23]

Pain and anxiety are perhaps the two most common reasons people seek naturopathic care in general. With reiki evidence being heavy in these areas and showing great promise with a myriad of other conditions and ailments, both acute and chronic, we should not overlook this powerful yet gentle and cost-effective therapy. Perhaps combining helpful naturopathic medicine modalities with reiki, which abides by all the naturopathic tenets, would be an enhanced treatment plan for greater success with patients across the board.



[14] Bukowski, E.L. “The Use of self-Reiki for Stress Reduction and Relaxation.” *Journal of Integrative Medicine*, Vol. 13, No. 5 (2015): 336–340.
 [15] Mackay, N., S. Hansen, and O. McFarlane. “Autonomic Nervous System Changes During Reiki Treatment: A Preliminary Study.” *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, Vol. 10, No. 6 (2004): 1077–1081.
 [16] Wardell, D.W., and J. Engebretson. “Biological correlates of Reiki Touchism healing.” *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, Vol. 33, No. 4 (2008): 439–445.
 [17] Green Lotus. *op. cit.*
 [18] Friedman, R.S.C., et al. “Effects of Reiki on Autonomic Activity Early After Acute Coronary Syndrome.” *Journal of the American College of Cardiology*, Vol. 56, No. 12 (2010): 995–996.
 [19] Green Lotus. *op. cit.*
 [20] Olson, K., and J. Hanson. “Using Reiki to Manage Pain: A Preliminary Report.” *Cancer Prevention & Control*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (1997): 108–113.
 [21] Coakley, A.B., and A.-M. Barron. “Energy Therapies in Oncology Nursing.” *Seminars in Oncology Nursing*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (2012): 55–63.
 [22] Bossi, L.M., M.J. Ott, and S. DeCristofaro. “Reiki as a Clinical Intervention in Oncology Nursing Practice.” *Clinical Journal of Oncology Nursing*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (2008): 489–494.
 [23] [No authors listed.] “Complementary and Alternative Medicine.” American Cancer Society website. <http://www.cancer.org/treatment/treatmentsandsideeffects/complementaryandalternativemedicine/manualhealingandphysicaltouch/reiki>