

A Quick Guide to Reiki

By Joe Kieda

Before I became a Reiki practitioner, I had never had a Reiki session. At the time, I was in school for massage therapy and I wanted to add something, for lack of a better word, magical to my future practice. I'd always been drawn to energy work and various spiritual practices, so Reiki seemed like the perfect fit. During my training I did receive sessions, but it was more in an educational way rather than getting one as a true client. In hindsight, probably not the smartest way to do it.

After I got my Master Teacher certification, and then my massage therapy license, I started practicing professionally, and quickly realized I had no idea how to talk to my clients about Reiki or energy work in general! I could describe it from a practitioner's perspective, and I knew what to expect from receiving sessions, doing self-healing, and just overall working with energy, but I didn't know how to convey that to people in a way where I wouldn't come off as overly esoteric or just out of my mind.

So that's what this article is meant to do. Clear up all the fogginess and help people who are interested in Reiki, as clients or even prospective students, understand what's going on.

FIRST THING'S FIRST, WHAT IS REIKI?

Reiki is a type of bodywork therapy that focuses on the energy field of the body rather than the physical body itself. A friend once asked me, "So it's like massage without the massage?"

Yeah, kinda!

The theory behind Reiki and every other type of energy work is that if we affect the energy body (meaning the aura, the chakras, the meridians, etc.), the physical body follows suit. And vice versa! So, if you break your arm, the energy field around that arm will be damaged as well. The idea is that if we smooth out that energy and try to repair it, brighten it, or just help it heal by allowing the energy to

move how it needs to, your physical arm will heal faster and more efficiently. Pain will be reduced, inflammation will recede, basically everything happens a little bit faster. Overall, Reiki is a facilitator for healing. And not just for physical injury. It can help with anxiety, depression, stress, disease; it can help your physical, emotional, and mental bodies, really the entirety of your being stay healthy and balanced.

OKAY, BUT HOW?

Reiki has its origins in Shinto philosophy. Full disclosure, I am not a scholar of Shinto, so I'm not going to attempt to go deep into the details, but what it comes down to is this. Reiki is one of the spiritual building blocks of our universe. The word itself is a combination of two Japanese words, rei and ki. Rei in this context refers to universal or divine spirit and ki, a word you may be familiar with already, means vital life force energy.

It's the soul force, the balancing force that keeps all the other building blocks together and allows for life to flourish. Essentially that means that Reiki is around and in all things all the time. So why do we need Reiki sessions if it's all over the place, you ask? Because to utilize the energy in a way that helps us balance and heal, we need to tune into, and allow our bodies to recognize, that specific frequency. And that's exactly what a Reiki Master or practitioner does.

During a Reiki session, the practitioner is actively connecting to that frequency and tuning your energetic and physical bodies to it just like a radio. When that happens, your energy body begins to balance. All that nasty, heavy stuff we pick up throughout the day, dealing with stress, and jobs, and traffic, and everything else that we don't want to deal with, clears out and falls away. The energetic parts of sickness and dysfunction start to heal. And in response, your physical body starts to heal as well.

Reiki is a good option for issues that have already manifested in your body, but it's also great as a preventative measure; something to do on a regular basis to ensure you stay healthy and your body stays balanced.

ARE YOU SUGGESTING INSTANTANEOUS RESULTS?

No. And yes, depending on the issue. One of the problems that comes up with energy work is how subjective it is. We may all be human beings, but we are also individuals with individual lives and individual bodies, immune systems, and responses to stimuli. So, if it's something simple like a headache or stress from an exam or something like that, chances are, yes that can be cleared out and relieved within a single short session. But, if that headache is a chronic migraine that you deal with three days a week, or that exam is the bar exam, that might be a bigger issue! It may require multiple sessions to help your body process and heal all of that stress and pain.

It's the same thing when it comes to sickness, disease, depression, or anything else. We as practitioners have no idea how your body is going to heal, which is why we'll usually suggest coming to see us for a few sessions, usually over the course of a few weeks to a couple months, to see how it's working for you. You may not see results after one session, or there may be a delayed effect where you see results a few days later. If you do see results, awesome, let's keep going! Your body takes time to adjust and adapt to what's going on, it'll take a while to balance. But the more you regularly get sessions, the quicker your body responds. It recognizes the energy and what's happening and says, okay I know this, let's get into it!

However, if you're not seeing results and you're just not getting anything out of it, you should find something else that works for you. Some people just respond better to certain therapies than others. It's the same with massage, chiropractic work, or acupuncture; some people will feel great and know this is for them, while others simply won't. And that's okay! A good practitioner will give suggestions on what to do instead or different avenues that may be a better fit.

An important thing to know is that Reiki, and all energy work, falls under what's called CAM, complementary and alternative medicine. It's not meant to replace your doctor, and it shouldn't. Reiki is an amazing therapy on its own, and a perfect complement to other treatments, but you should never forgo seeing a medical professional if you need one, and I will never suggest otherwise.

WHAT CAN I ACTUALLY EXPECT DURING A SESSION?

The first thing you can expect is to have a short conversation with your practitioner. They'll ask you how you're feeling and if there's anything specific that you want to focus on, whether it's something physical or emotional (or both), and you can give as much or as little detail as you feel comfortable. Or, if you're just curious and want to know what it's like, that's a perfectly legitimate reason as well.

At that point they'll ask you to hop onto a massage table. There's no need to disrobe, Reiki can be done easily over clothing. However, they may ask you to remove any stone or crystal jewelry or any loose crystals from your pockets if you have any, as sometimes the energy from them can interfere with what we feel. Then, all you have to do is relax. Meditate if you're able or would like to, or just focus on your breathing. If you fall asleep, that's okay, it happens more often than you'd think.

Throughout the session most practitioners mainly do what's called scanning, where we hover our hands over your body, and sometimes they'll place their hands in specific spots, usually the sides of the head, abdomen, hands, and feet. Some, myself included, will take you through a guided meditation, breathing exercises, or even a moving meditation beforehand, similar to Tai Chi or Qi Gong. Every Reiki practitioner is different and we all have our different styles and techniques.

Now, as far as what you can expect to feel during a session, that is incredibly varied. The most common experiences are sensations of heat, movement of energy over the body in rhythmic or pulsating waves, a magnetic push and pull, static, pins and needles, goosebumps, or slight shivers down your spine. Or, you may not feel anything at all. Depending on how sensitive you are to these types of things, you may feel stuff right away in your very first session, or it might take a few sessions for your body to adapt. Or it may never come at all and that's okay. People tend to get a bit hung up on feeling something physical, and that's completely understandable because they want to know something is happening.

But the most important thing to remember is that these physical sensations are not the actual work. Even if you never feel them it doesn't mean Reiki isn't working or connecting with you. What's actually going on is that your body is trying to make sense of the energetic shifts that are happening, so it creates these different sensations because it's not sure how else to react. Over time you will most likely become more sensitive to the actual energy shifts, and you may feel less of the physical, surface sensations and much more of the deeper, subtle changes that are taking place.

After the session, another short conversation will take place where we ask about how you're feeling, if there's anything you want to talk about, or any questions you have. The practitioner will usually give you their impressions as well, whether they sensed anything that may need more work or if they have recommendations for any kind of self-care you can do at home. At the very least, that will include drinking lots of water and just taking some time for yourself, which honestly we could all use more of.

At the time of this writing, I've been practicing Reiki for just about 14 years and I am still constantly learning new stuff about it. It's this beautiful, gentle, calming thing that's so subtle it's easy to take it for granted. But just like a flowing river, that gentle, subtle energy can erode even the hardest stone. Because of its nature and the very definition of what it is, Reiki can only ever balance and heal, it can never cause harm.

So, in the words of my teacher, expect nothing, welcome everything.