

Reiki, the Scientific Evidence

BY ANN LINDA BALDWIN, PHD

PEOPLE WHO HAVE GIVEN and/or received Reiki know, first hand, how energizing it feels and how one's worries seem to melt away after a session. However, people who have not experienced, or even heard of Reiki may naturally be more skeptical, and may not want to venture into the unknown. What is really needed is scientific evidence showing exactly what Reiki can do to promote health and wellness. Fortunately, the Center for Reiki Research (CRR) has set up an easily accessible website (www.center-forreikiresearch.org) in order to promote people's scientific awareness of Reiki. This

Probably the most commonly reported benefit of Reiki is that it reduces stress. One of the first places in the body that stress manifests itself is in the heart and circulation. Heart rate and blood pressure both increase during stress and these responses are caused by increased activity of sympathetic nerves in the heart. On the other hand, increased activity of the parasympathetic or vagal nerves causes the heart to relax. Studies have shown that Reiki can reduce the stress response of the heart in both humans and animals. Friedman et al (2010) found that when nurses gave

tative music (13 patients) or just received standard care (12 patients). Unfortunately the study did not include a sham Reiki group, in which someone untrained in Reiki mimics the hand-positions of Reiki, and so we do not know whether just touching the patients, without giving Reiki, would have the same effect.

Studies of Reiki on animals provide particularly robust data because the animals are all kept under the same controlled conditions and so variations in diet and lifestyle that are present in human studies are eliminated. This

...there is preliminary scientific evidence that Reiki reduces stress, pain, depression and anxiety, and can help mild Alzheimer's patients to overcome their cognitive impairment to some degree...

site provides a list of evidence-based research published in peer-reviewed journals along with a critical summary of each study. The list is kept up to date and currently includes 33 studies. The summaries of the studies were produced by carefully analyzing the quality of each study in terms of experimental design, methodology, results, statistics, and conclusions, using a procedure developed by CRR named The Touchstone Process.

The following is a distillation of findings from the more robust of the studies (as scored 'Very Good' or 'Excellent' by The Touchstone Process in terms of the above criteria) that demonstrate positive physical effects of Reiki.

Reiki to 12 patients recovering from acute coronary syndrome, a disease involving blockage of the coronary arteries, the vagal nerves became more active, indicating a relaxation effect, as reflected by changes in the heart rate variability. This was a good sign because medications that enhance vagal nerve activity, such as beta-adrenergic blockers, improve the outcomes of patients with this type of heart disease. So in this case Reiki was having a similar effect as a medicine that is a known effective therapy for heart disease. The increase in vagal nerve activity was statistically significant compared to the results from the groups of patients who listened to medi-

means that the results are easier to interpret unambiguously. Baldwin and colleagues (2006, 2008) showed that Reiki, compared with sham Reiki, significantly reduced the physiological effects of stress in rats. In previous experiments, Wilson and Baldwin (1998) discovered that their research rats were stressed by the noisy environment in which they were housed and that the stress was manifesting in the body as shown by cellular damage. Baldwin wondered whether giving the rats Reiki would (i) reduce their stress and (ii) heal the damage, and so she designed experiments to test this hypothesis. In one study (Baldwin et al, 2008), a Reiki practitioner sat in front of