



Dr. Andrew Weil's

Self Healing

CREATING NATURAL HEALTH FOR YOUR BODY AND MIND

www.drweilselfhealing.com

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Dear Reader,

Fall has a certain energy to it: School is back in full swing, brilliant colors invigorate the landscape, and crisper air refreshes the soul. The season brings us gifts from nature, such as autumn leaves and pumpkins (see the story on page 3). And it brings people into closer contact, increasing the spread of germs (see page 2).

This fall also marks the release of a new recording about integrative medicine that I've created with other physicians from the Program in Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona. Check out the enclosed insert for details.

Sincerely,

You can write to *Self Healing* at 42 Pleasant St., Watertown MA 02472.

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Energy Medicine: A New Frontier

Throughout history, many cultures have believed in the existence of some sort of energy that permeates all living organisms, including human beings. This universal life energy—called *qi* (or *chi*) in China, *ki* in Japan, and *prana* in India—is thought to circulate throughout the body and in an energy field surrounding the body. Health, according to this model, is the harmonious flow of life energy, while imbalances in this flow (due to unhealthy habits or emotions, for example) may result in illness. Healers in many cultures have used their hands to transmit energy to sick people (with or without touching them), in order to balance the flow of life energy.

While these ideas may sound foreign to our ears, conventional medicine has long used machines that emit or record various forms of energy to diagnose or treat disease. For example, x-ray and laser devices give off different kinds of energy, while ECGs and EEGs record the electrical activity of the heart and brain, respectively.

Now, therapies such as Therapeutic Touch (TT) and Reiki in which practitioners use their hands to transmit subtler forms of energy, not easily measured by current scientific methods, are being shown to induce relaxation, relieve pain, speed wound healing, and even boost immune function. Meanwhile, therapies that use other means to influence the body's flow of subtle energies are proving beneficial as well—acupuncture uses thin needles; tai chi, qigong, and yoga use movement; and homeopathy uses highly diluted remedies made from natural substances. I expect that all of these therapies, which fall under the umbrella term “energy medicine,” will enter the medical mainstream in the coming decades, as researchers

A guide to energy therapies that may promote relaxation, ease pain, and speed healing.

and clinicians learn more about their benefits and how they might work.

This month, I'll focus on therapies that involve energy transmission through the practitioner's hands. These energy-healing therapies don't involve massage or manipulation of muscles, and they aren't intended to diagnose disease. Rather, practitioners place their hands on various areas of the client's body, or move their hands near the body, in order to influence the body's energy flow. Thanks to a growing body of positive research, energy therapies are increasingly being offered in hospitals and other health-care settings as adjuncts to conventional care. Here at the University of Arizona's Integrative Medicine Clinic, we often recommend energy therapies to patients seeking complementary treatment for pain. We've also found that these therapies can promote relaxation and ease anxiety in patients preparing for a hospital stay or suffering from chronic debilitating diseases.

Profiles of 3 Energy Therapies

In the following section, you'll learn about three energy therapies that have impressed me. Despite their different methods, all of them are noninvasive, painless, and safe, and all claim to enhance and balance the circulation of energy

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throughout the body. They can be used alone for relaxation or general wellness, but should be complementary to regular medical care for actual health problems. The number of treatments needed varies according to the patient's health concern. For each therapy, I've described a typical session, but practitioners can also perform shorter treatments depending on the patient's needs. For instance, a nurse trained in TT or Reiki may offer an abbreviated version of the therapy whenever she comes in to draw blood or change a dressing.

To choose from among these and other energy therapies (see box on page 7), consider which ones sound appealing to you and what practitioners are available in your area.

Therapeutic Touch. The therapy's name is something of a misnomer, since it rarely involves actual touch. Instead, practitioners (mostly registered nurses) use their hands to assess and balance the energy field surrounding the body in order to promote our own natural ability to heal. TT is primarily used with hospitalized patients, but it's increasingly being offered in outpatient settings as well. A contemporary interpretation of several ancient healing practices, TT was developed in the early 1970s by Dolores Krieger, PhD, a registered nurse and then a professor at New York University, and Dora Kunz, a noted healer.

WHO MAY BENEFIT TT is the best researched of the energy therapies and has shown good results in several studies. A recent review in the *Annals of Internal Medicine* (June 6,

2000) found a positive treatment effect in seven of 11 randomized, controlled trials of TT. In these trials, TT offered help for osteoarthritis of the knee, tension headache, pain and anxiety in burn patients, and wound healing. Other research suggests that TT can boost immunity in highly stressed people. Incidentally, I put little stock in a widely publicized 1998 study in which a grade-school student supposedly debunked TT. That study had many flaws and didn't address TT's efficacy as a treatment modality.

WHAT TO EXPECT A typical TT session lasts 15 to 30 minutes and costs \$25 to \$75 (which may be covered by your health insurer if TT is done by a hospital nurse). The client remains fully clothed and often sits in a chair, but can lie down if sitting is uncomfortable. The practitioner begins by briefly "centering" herself, focusing on her intention to help the client. Next, the practitioner moves her hands a few inches above the client's body, from head to toe, to sense areas of imbalance in the client's energy field (which the practitioner may experience as heat, cold, pressure, tingling, or other sensations). When the practitioner identifies an area of energetic imbalance, it may or may not correspond to the location of the patient's symptoms. Rather, an energetic imbalance in one area may be associated with pain or disease in another location. The practitioner then "unruffles" areas of congested energy with a series of sweeping hand movements. Finally, the practitioner transmits energy to areas of low energy by holding her hands above them. Clients often say they feel both relaxed and energized by TT treatments.

To learn more, see *A Doctor's Guide to Therapeutic Touch* by Susan Wager, MD (Perigee, 1996). To locate a practitioner, contact Nurse Healers-Professional Associates International at (801) 273-3399 or www.therapeutic-touch.org.

Reiki. Reiki (pronounced *ray-key*) means "universal life energy" in Japanese. Reiki practitioners use light hand placements to channel energy to the recipient. The goal is to balance and enhance the individual's energy to promote optimum health. Reiki was developed in the mid-1800s by Japanese educator Mikao Usui, based on concepts in ancient Buddhist scriptures. This therapy came to the United States in the late 1930s.

WHO MAY BENEFIT Reiki is often used as an adjunctive treatment for acute or chronic pain. A 1997 uncontrolled pilot study, involving 20 patients experiencing pain from various conditions, found that pain levels were significantly lower following a session of Reiki compared to just before the session. University of Michigan researchers are now investigating the effectiveness of Reiki in managing pain caused by diabetic neuropathy. Reiki is also used to ease anxiety in patients preparing for surgery: Portsmouth Regional Hospital in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, offers Reiki to preoperative patients.

The Mystery of Energy Transfer

Research shows that energy-healing therapies can relieve pain and speed wound healing, but how do these therapies work? We're not sure yet, but skeptics might say these benefits are placebo responses due to human touch (which itself can be relaxing and soothing) or some other positive interaction with energy healers. Still, it's also possible (and I think likely) that some sort of energy transfer between the healer and client has therapeutic effects.

Because energy therapies claim to use subtle forms of energy not yet easily measured by current scientific methods, researchers have only begun attempting to study these energies and discover how they're generated. Scientists are also now exploring how currently measurable forms of energy might be transmitted between any two people, as a first step to

determining how subtle energies may go from a healer to a client. For example, Gary Schwartz, PhD, and Linda Russek, PhD, who direct the Human Energy Systems Laboratory here at the University of Arizona, have shown that the electrical impulses generated by one person's heart (measured by ECG) can affect the electrical impulses in the brain of another person (measured by EEG) sitting a few feet away, particularly if the people feel that they received strong love from their parents.

As researchers continue to study how energy therapies may work, I think it would be a mistake not to make use of their healing powers until we have all the answers.

To learn more, see Schwartz and Russek's book, *The Living Energy Universe* (Hampton Roads, 1999).

Other Energy Therapies

What's more, Reiki may speed wound healing: The five-year-old daughter of a newsletter staff member was recently hospitalized for a second-degree burn on her stomach, and Reiki treatments provided by a family friend who is a trained practitioner may have contributed to her faster-than-expected recovery. In addition, Reiki may be helpful in treating stress-related conditions such as gastrointestinal problems and skin disorders.

WHAT TO EXPECT A typical Reiki session lasts 60 to 90 minutes and costs \$45 to \$100. The client remains fully clothed and often lies on a padded table or other comfortable surface. The practitioner gently places both hands, palms down, on a sequence of approximately 12 standard sites throughout the body, in order to channel energy to those areas. The client may experience this transfer of energy as heat, cold, vibration, or unusual heaviness. The practitioner typically begins at the client's head and maintains each hand position for three to five minutes. The practitioner may also place her hands on other sites beyond the 12 standard ones—for instance, to channel energy to painful or diseased areas.

To learn more, see *Reiki Energy Medicine* by Libby Barnett and Maggie Chambers (Healing Arts Press, 1996). To locate a practitioner, call The Reiki Alliance at (208) 783-3535.

Jin Shin Jyutsu. This oriental system (pronounced *gin shin jit-su*) is based on the idea that our bodies contain several energy pathways, similar to acupuncture meridians. For various reasons—including stress, accidents, illness, lifestyle habits, and negative attitudes—these pathways may become blocked, compromising health. By gently placing their fingertips on specific sites, practitioners use their hands as “jumper cables” to unblock the flow of energy. Said to derive from ancient practices, Jin Shin Jyutsu (JSJ) was “rediscovered” in the early 1900s by Japanese scholar Jiro Murai. His first student, Mary Burmeister, began teaching JSJ in the United States during the early 1960s.

WHO MAY BENEFIT The relaxing effects of JSJ make it a useful complementary therapy for a variety of health concerns, including acute or chronic pain, asthma and other respiratory disorders, high blood pressure, insomnia, and sexual dysfunction. A trial program at California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC) in San Francisco has been providing JSJ to patients awaiting a heart transplant. In feedback surveys, these patients have reported a reduction in anxiety and depression, among other benefits. Also at CPMC, a study is now under way to determine whether JSJ can reduce fatigue and nausea and improve quality of life in breast cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy.

WHAT TO EXPECT A typical JSJ session lasts about an hour and costs \$40 to \$70. The client remains fully clothed and lies face up on a padded table or other comfortable surface. The practitioner first places her hands on the client's wrists to

Here are five more energy-healing therapies you might explore. As with the therapies discussed in the main article, these approaches can be used alone for relaxation or general wellness, but should be complementary to regular medical care for actual health problems.

- **Brennan Healing Science.** Developed by a former NASA physicist, this system uses hands-on techniques and other approaches to balance the client's energy field. Practitioners undergo a four-year certification program. For information, contact the Barbara Brennan School of Healing at (800) 924-2564 or www.barbarabrennan.com.

- **Healing Touch.** Practiced primarily by nurses, this approach includes elements of Therapeutic Touch and other energy-based therapies. Practitioners use light touch or work with their hands near the client's body. For information, contact Healing Touch International, Inc., at (303) 989-7982 or www.healingtouch.net.

- **Johrei.** This energy therapy from Japan (pronounced jo-ray) is also considered a form of spiritual healing. Practitioners accept donations rather than charging fees. For information, contact the Johrei Fellowship at (310) 523-3840 or www.johreifellowship.com.

- **Polarity Therapy.** In this eclectic approach, practitioners use light touch, deep massage, or rocking movements to balance the body's energy flow. They also offer advice on diet, exercise, and self-awareness. For information, contact the American Polarity Therapy Association at (303) 545-2080 or www.polaritytherapy.org.

- **SHEN Therapy.** The acronym stands for “specific human energy nexus.” Practitioners use light hand placements to release repressed emotions that may be contributing to emotional or physical disorders. For information, call the SHEN Therapy Institute at (415) 332-2593.

“listen” to several energy pulses. Depending on the energy imbalances she detects, the practitioner then gently places her hands on various combinations of 52 sites throughout the body (26 on each side) called “safety energy locks,” with the goal of releasing energy blockages along particular pathways. Clients typically report that JSJ treatments are deeply relaxing. At the end of the session, the practitioner may suggest self-help exercises to perform at home.

To learn more, see *The Touch of Healing* by Alice Burmeister with Tom Monte (Bantam, 1997). To locate a practitioner, call Jin Shin Jyutsu, Inc., at (480) 998-9331.

A Word to the Wise

If you seek out treatment through one of the organizations listed in this article (or in the box above), the practitioner will have undergone some sort of approved training. However, anyone can call himself or herself an energy healer and advertise for clients. Don't hesitate to ask about a practitioner's training and professional experience (the more training and experience the better). Because energy therapies often involve hands-on work, make sure that you feel comfortable with the practitioner. Also, beware of anyone who promises miracle cures or recommends that you forgo standard medical care. ☺

