

## What Is It?

Energy healing is a broad term for any type of healing that smoothes out, manipulates, restores, or balances the flow of energy in the body. It is grounded in the belief that, in addition to its physical and biochemical systems, the human body is made up of a complex system of invisible energy. Often referred to in English as "universal life force energy," it is called by different names in different cultures: The Chinese know it as *qi*; the Japanese refer to it as *ki*; in India, it is *prana*. The NIH's National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine, charged with researching the effectiveness of such therapies, categorizes the various modes of energy healing as "biofield therapies."

It is believed that this vital life force energy continually flows throughout the body in organized patterns, just as blood does. Unlike blood, however, life force energy does not stop at the surface of the skin but extends several inches beyond the body, thereby creating a unique energy field (the biofield or aura) for each individual.

When a person's energy flows freely in a balanced, symmetrical manner, good health can be maintained. However, when the energy flow becomes restricted, disordered, or weakened, an imbalance occurs and an excess or deficiency of energy results. This can lead to symptoms of emotional and physical distress and eventually to chronic pain and disease.

Many traditional health systems have long recognized this vital life force principle and have employed it in healing. Indeed, such widely known systems as East Asian medicine (acupuncture, acupressure, shiatsu, and so on), homeopathy, naturopathy, Ayurvedic medicine, anthroposophical medicine, traditional osteopathy, chiropractic, and shamanistic healing use some aspect of the vital life force principle in diagnosis and treatment. In addition, practices such as yoga, tai chi, qigong, and some forms of meditation incorporate perceiving and directing this energy flow in one's own body. Lesser known therapies that use energy healing include crystal and gem therapy, Bach flower remedies, magnet therapy, and craniosacral therapy.

More recently, the term "energy healing" has come to refer to the abilities of individual healers who diagnose and treat energy imbalances in clients using their own energy fields. In some cultures such healers are considered to have God-given spiritual gifts. However, as energy healing has become more widely recognized, the methods of energy healing taught in various cultures are now being integrated into training programs and professional schools. In such programs, practitioners learn to develop their innate talents in a consistent manner. Common hands-on energy healing practices taught in the United States include Therapeutic Touch, Healing Touch, Reiki, polarity therapy, and Jin Shin Jyutsu.

For more on these and the other energy healing methods mentioned above, see the **WholeHealthMD Reference Library**.

## How Does It Work?

Those who have had success with energy healing believe that the treatments work by manipulating the energy that pulsates in and around all living beings. Energetic

intervention by a practitioner, either through the hands or other methods, can serve to correct imbalances in energy flow, restore symmetry, and re-establish the free flow of energy through the body's energy pathways. These pathways are known in energy healing as channels (meridians), chakras, and etheric levels.

**Channels.** According to traditional Chinese medicine, shiatsu, and other acupressure systems, energy flows through a person's body via various acupoints that are organized into channels, or meridians. The meridian system contains several hundred points that can be manipulated to promote energy balance in parts of the body that experience discomfort or disease. Although Western science has been able to measure the existence of the acupoints using their electrical properties, researchers are still investigating ways to measure the groupings of points in the meridian channels. Studies have shown that stimulating acupoints can release chemical messengers in the body, including endorphins, the body's natural painkillers.

**Chakras.** In Indian or Ayurvedic medicine it is believed that the body's vital energy flows up from the feet to the top of the head and concentrates at different levels in the body called chakras. Maps of the body's chakras generally show seven major chakras along the centerline of the body, and multiple minor chakras outside the body and along the extremities. The state of each chakra reflects the health of a particular area of your body. It also reflects your psychological, emotional, and spiritual well-being. When chakra energy is blocked or misdirected, emotional and physical illness can arise.

**Etheric levels.** According to energy healing, just above the skin's surface, the human energy field is divided into so-called etheric levels. Each of these levels is three dimensional and envelops the body like a sheath or shell. The levels closest to the body are the physical, emotional, and mental. The physical level is linked to vitality and is the one most easily seen in a person's aura. The emotional level contains the energy associated with both positive and negative emotions. Because physical and emotional energies are interconnected, emotions can have a profound effect on how the body functions. The third level is the mental field and contains energy associated with thought, conceptualization, rationalization, and interpretation of events. Energy from this layer surrounds and interfaces with the emotional level, intensifying the relationship between thoughts and feelings.

In diagnosing and treating a client, a practitioner of energy healing will look at the pattern of energy flow in one or more of these pathways, and manipulate energy wherever it is blocked. Often during a session, a client will achieve a deep state of relaxation. Western science tells us that such deep relaxation helps to balance the autonomic nervous system and possibly trigger the release of hormones and neurotransmitters, which can help to decrease pain and increase a sense of well-being.

Energy healing can also release emotional energy and create increased awareness of mind-body patterns that contribute to energy imbalances. Most people who receive an energy healing session note an immediate decrease in their stress level, which has long been recognized as a major contributor to wellness.

## What You Can Expect

Receiving energy healing should be a soothing experience. A session typically begins with a thorough health history, as well as a discussion of the conditions for which you are seeking relief. The practitioner will likely ask you about any previous medical problems in addition to learning about your diet and exercise habits, your home and work life, and your general mental and emotional health.

The practitioner will then do an energy "diagnosis," using various techniques that can reveal the major areas of imbalance. Among the diagnostic methods that may be employed are body scanning (either visually or with the hands on or off the body), use of a pendulum to read the energy flows at each chakra, and applied kinesiology to uncover imbalances that can lead to muscle weakness.

As the practitioner gets information from the body, various possibilities for treatment will be discussed. A well-trained practitioner may specialize in one method of energy healing or may be able to provide various therapies. These may include hands-on healing techniques such as Therapeutic Touch, Healing Touch, Reiki, and shiatsu, as well as the use of scents (aromatherapy) and flower remedies. Some therapists may also incorporate the use of colored light, tuning forks or the voice (harmonics), movement therapies, and dialogue. Depending on your ailment you may also be referred to an acupuncturist, chiropractor, osteopath, homeopath, or behavioral health practitioner for additional treatment.

An energy healing session usually lasts an hour, depending on the condition being addressed. For basic stress reduction, a few sessions may be all that are needed, with follow-up sessions scheduled if necessary. For the treatment of chronic diseases, long-term treatment, often in conjunction with a conventional medical doctor and/or one or more other medical practitioners, (e.g., naturopath, osteopath, chiropractor), may be required.

## Health Benefits

There have been few controlled studies showing direct health benefits from energy healing, but there is much anecdotal history, some of it dating back centuries, about the efficacy of the techniques that are used. It is important to note that energy healing is not a substitute for conventional medical care. However, as an adjunctive treatment it can be a very effective and noninvasive approach.

Of the various energy healing practices, Therapeutic Touch, Healing Touch, and Reiki have been the most widely and successfully used in hospitals, hospices, and out-patient facilities. Each of these practices has been found to accelerate healing, quicken recovery from surgery and trauma, reduce pain, lessen stress, and assist with emotional and spiritual healing.

Among the specific ailments for which energy healing has been found effective are chronic tension and migraine headache, chronic neck pain and low back pain, osteoarthritic pain, digestive complaints, fibromyalgia, respiratory problems, hypertension, mild depression, and anxiety. Some people like to use energy healing as a

preventive therapy, believing that blockages in energy flow can occur before actual medical conditions begin to manifest themselves.

For more information on the health benefits attributed to specific energy healing modalities see the **WholeHealthMD Resource Library**.

### Cautions

Energy healing does not cure disease and is not intended to be the primary treatment for any health problem. Rather it is a complementary therapy meant to support other ongoing physical, mental, and emotional treatment.

Energy healing is not recommended for broken bones, acute pain, or any condition requiring immediate medical attention, although it may provide a calming effect before, during, or after medical-surgical interventions.

Work with the emotional aspects of energy can release old feelings of emotional distress. While energy healing holds promise for helping resolve such distress, persons with a history of mental health disorders should have a trained counselor or psychiatrist available to them when undergoing a series of energy healing sessions. In addition, the energy healing practitioner should be comfortable in referring clients to counselors for mental and emotional problems outside of the healer's expertise.

There is a slight chance of nausea and dizziness occurring after certain energy healing treatments.

A person in a weakened state may become irritable and uncomfortable if flooded with too much energy during a treatment.