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# Magic Touch

Reiki uses “universal life energy” to support the body’s natural ability to heal itself

|> BY PAMELA DURKIN

**T**OUCH is the most fundamental of all the senses and the first one to develop in the human body. Without it, we cannot thrive. It nourishes, entices, soothes — and more importantly — it heals.

Victoria naturopath Dr. Jocelyn Taitt concurs.


“Touch is critical for our well-being at every stage of life,” she says. “It has a profound effect on both our physical and mental health.”

The healing power of touch is certainly not a new discovery. Its therapeutic power is described in both the Judeo-Christian Old and New Testaments. Unfortunately, in the “scientific” age, touch therapies were often decried as “nonsense” and viewed with widespread skepticism by the medical community. However, with the current renaissance of holistic medicine we are once again recognizing the amazing healing potential of touch.

One system of touch therapy that is gaining recognition and acceptance in the medical field is Reiki, an ancient tradition that uses “universal life energy” to support the body’s natural ability to heal itself.


After decades of skepticism and dismissal, the effectiveness of Reiki is finally being proven via peer-reviewed double-blind studies and top medical facilities around the globe are utilizing it as a valuable adjunct in the treatment of pain, depression, anxiety and more.

While only a handful of Canadian hospitals, such as Toronto’s Princess Margaret, currently employ Reiki as a supportive treatment tool, there are now more than 60 US hospitals, including renowned places like the Mayo Clinic and Johns Hopkins, that offer Reiki as part of their patient services. And worldwide, Reiki is now widely used in cancer support centres, drug and alcohol rehabilitation clinics and in palliative care facilities.




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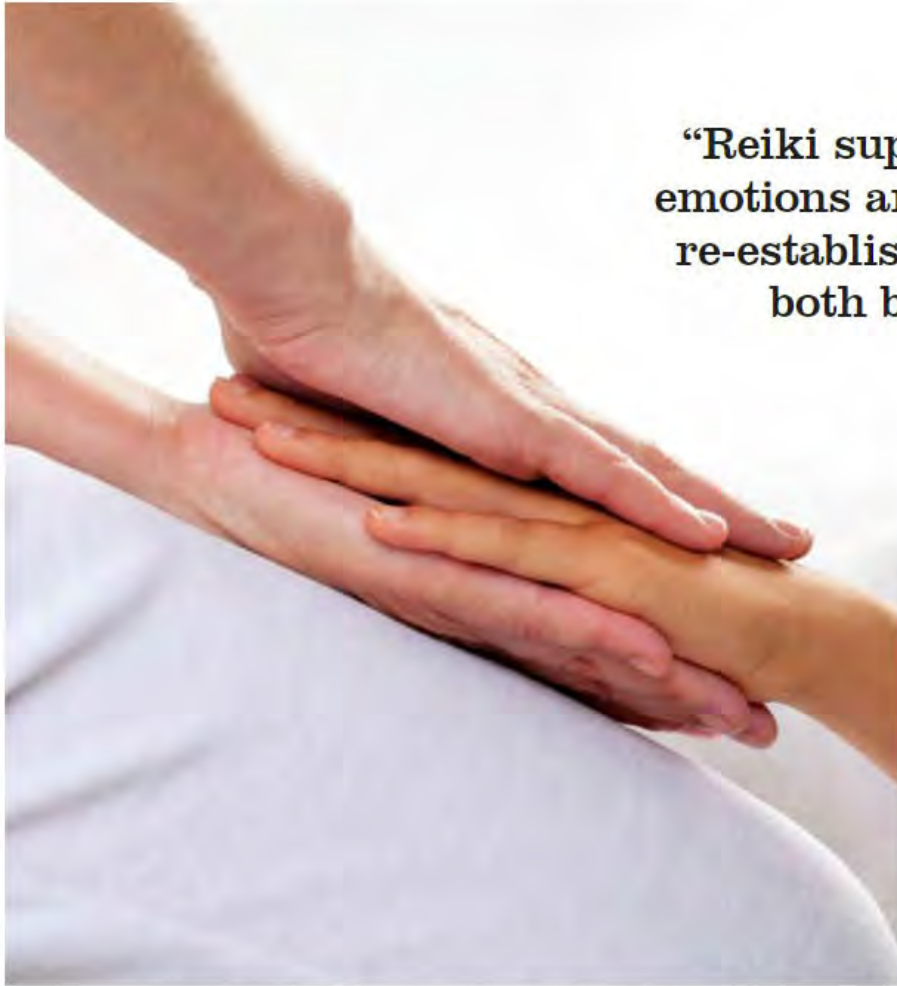
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**“Reiki supports the release of emotions and energy blockages, re-establishing equilibrium in both body and mind.”**

#### **Reiki 101**

Reiki is a Japanese word derived from rei, meaning “universal,” and ki, meaning “vital life force.” It is a relaxing form of healing therapy that is applied through gentle, non-invasive, non-manipulative touch. In its basic form, it involves the Reiki practitioner laying his or her hands just above — or on — the clothed body of a client, slowly working over the front and back in a concentrated progression of hand movements.

Although various accounts relate slightly different versions of its history, it is thought that Reiki began in Tibet several thousand years ago. Dr. Mikao Usui, a Japanese scholar, is acknowledged for rediscovering the lost art of Reiki in the 19th century. He passed on his knowledge to others who have since spread the practice of Reiki worldwide.

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Proponents of the therapy believe that the power of physical touch, by way of the palms of the hand and tips of the fingers, can be used to channel the body's natural energy in a way that promotes general healing and overall good health.

### **The Science**

Scientists are not completely certain how Reiki wields its magic, but several biological indicators suggest it activates our parasympathetic nervous system (aka our "rest and digest" system) and halts the body's "fight and flight" stress response. How does this translate into a positive biological response in humans? Clinicians at both New York Presbyterian and Columbia hospitals found that Reiki treatments can lower heart rate, respiration and blood pressure. Given this, it's not surprising that a recent meta analysis published in *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice* concluded that Reiki is an effective approach to relieving pain and reducing levels of anxiety and depression.

Several studies also suggest the gentle therapy can improve certain behaviour and memory problems in patients with mild cognitive impairments or Alzheimer's. What's more, as reported in the *Journal of General Internal Medicine*, it can calm dementia patients.

Finally, ongoing research points to its effectiveness at treating insomnia, increasing mobility in those with arthritis and Type-2 diabetes, accelerating recovery from sports injuries and surgery, and alleviating the symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome.

### **The Treatment**

With my curiosity piqued, I decided it was time to experience Reiki firsthand. The decision led me back to Dr. Taitt, who, in addition to being a naturopath, is also a seasoned Reiki master. We began the session by discussing my past and current health concerns and honed in on areas I wanted to focus on during this first treatment.

Proceeding to the massage table I grew ever more curious. What would Reiki "feel" like and how would my body react? As Dr. Taitt placed her hands on different sites along my body, I became aware of intense heat emanating from the areas she was working on, in addition to some "tingling."

What surprised me most, though, was the rather profound emotional response I experienced while she was working on the crown area of my head. I felt overcome by a sadness I was at a loss to explain. When we discussed this at the end of my treatment, Dr. Taitt explained that we often carry emotions in our bodies like memories, and they can become trapped and block the flow of "vital energy," causing both physical and emotional discomfort.

"Reiki supports the release of emotions and energy blockages, re-establishing equilibrium in both body and mind," she notes.

By the end of my treatment I felt blissfully relaxed, and this state of calm wasn't just ephemeral, either. It lasted for several days. So what's my conclusion? While Reiki is clearly not a cure-all, it certainly is a valid and valuable treatment that should be considered as a health-enhancing support for a variety of modern-day ills. **①**



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