

What Is Energy Healing? A Beginner's Guide to This Complementary Practice



The practice of energy healing has been around for centuries in cultures all over the world and has recently been picking up steam in the United States. Advocates for energy healing claim it comes with numerous health benefits, including reduced pain, improved depression and anxiety symptoms, and an overall sense of well-being.

But does credible research back these promises or is it a bunch of pseudoscience? Read on to learn more about energy healing, what the research says, and how you can get started if you're interested in giving energy healing a try.

Definition of Energy Healing

Energy healing is a complementary approach based on the belief that our bodies have energy flowing through them, and that healing can come from helping to balance this flow, per the [National Cancer Institute \(NCI\)](#).

According to the [National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health \(NCCIH\)](#), energy healing therapy, also known as energy medicine, is a technique in which a practitioner channels healing energy through their hands (or other mediums, like [acupuncture](#) needles) to the client's body to restore energy balance, which in turn brings about purported health benefits. Energy healing may or may not involve physical touch.

History of Energy Healing

Energy healing has roots in ancient forms of medicine, such as traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) and [ayurveda](#). According to [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#), the basic concept of TCM is that a vital energy force, known as “qi,” surges throughout the body. When there is an imbalance of qi, disease and illness may result.

Similarly, ayurveda, which originated in India more than 3,000 years ago, is a system of medicine based on the principle that disease is caused by an imbalance or stress in a person's consciousness, per [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#). The vital energy concept in ayurveda is called “prana” and has similarities to qi in TCM.

In both TCM and ayurveda, the goal is to support the body to achieve balance and realign your energy to find healing. This is done with a number of tools, such as [massage therapy](#), [acupuncture](#), and movement therapies like [yoga](#) and [tai chi](#).

How Energy Healing Works

There's no scientific consensus about how energy healing therapies work. Energy healing encompasses a variety of techniques believed to clear blockages in the energy field that contribute to imbalance in a person's life, says [Kristen Blythe](#), a reiki master teacher from the greater Boston area with training in more than a dozen energy healing modalities from around the world.

“Energy healing works on the principle that our physical body and life experiences are informed by the energies that exist in our energy field, and any imbalances or blocks in our energy field can contribute to emotional challenges, physical pain or illness, limiting life patterns, and other unwanted conditions in a person's life,” she says.

How to Find an Energy Healing Practitioner

Most modalities of energy healing do not have an official regulating body, and there may be various schools and certifications available depending on the type. This can make it challenging to find a trusted practitioner, and you'll need to do some research.

Blythe advises asking practitioners if they've taken certification courses in the methods they offer.

“It's also important to consider the number of years of experience the practitioner has, as this can frequently be the best indicator of skill,” she notes. “As with any service, asking friends and acquaintances [or an integrative doctor] for a referral is often the safest bet for finding the right person to work with.”

Types of Energy Healing

There are dozens of energy healing modalities that come from traditions throughout the world, and some are more new-age creations. These include reiki, acupuncture, crystal healing, sound healing, [qigong](#), reflexology, touch therapy, chakra balancing, polarity balancing, quantum energy healing, shamanic healing, [emotional freedom techniques](#), and aura cleansing — though this list is not exhaustive, and the [Institute of Noetic Sciences](#) has resources on many more techniques.

While modern-day research is still emerging for many of these practices, the following types of energy healing have some scientific backing.

Reiki

Reiki is a form of energy healing in which a practitioner uses their hands and gentle touch to channel energy to the client's body, per the [Cleveland Clinic](#). The goal is to improve the flow and balance of energy to promote relaxation and healing.

Healing Touch and Therapeutic Touch

These are similar techniques dating from the 1970s and '80s and are used in some hospital settings. They're somewhat related to reiki, and have research to support their possible efficacy, but differ from reiki in some beliefs and techniques, like the use of touch or no touch, per the [Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing](#) articles on healing touch.

Qigong

[Qigong](#) is an ancient traditional Chinese practice involving breathing exercises and movement that aims to optimize energy within the body, mind, and spirit in order to maintain health and well-being, according to the [NCCIH](#).

Reflexology

Reflexology is a type of energy healing in which pressure is applied to different parts of the feet to promote healing throughout the body, per the [Cleveland Clinic](#). It's rooted in traditional Chinese medicine and is believed to help balance the body's energy.

A Special Note on Acupuncture

[Acupuncture](#) is a practice from traditional Chinese medicine in which very thin needles are inserted into the skin and then manipulated gently by the practitioner's hands or by electrical stimulation, according to [Johns Hopkins Medicine](#). When applied and moved to certain points on the body, it's believed these needles restore energy flow and improve health.

Acupuncture is often included in energy healing topics, but it has significantly more research and evidence to support its use for pain and various other conditions, including clinical studies and experimental research on its mechanisms. This sets it slightly apart from other forms of energy healing in a biomedical context. You can learn more from the [NCCIH](#) about the broad research studies on acupuncture over the years.

Possible Benefits of Energy Healing

Scientific research on the health benefits of energy healing is lacking; the field needs more rigorous studies to determine efficacy. Some data suggests some forms of energy healing, including reiki, acupuncture, qigong, and reflexology may come with several health benefits, such as pain relief, improved depression and anxiety, and enhanced overall well-being.

[Soussan Ayubcha, MD](#), an assistant professor of clinical family medicine and community health at the Perelman School of Medicine at the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, notes these studies are too small to support general recommendations, and other studies show no clinical significance to date.

Here's what some of the science says so far about the reported potential benefits.

Pain Relief

A major benefit of energy healing touted by practitioners is pain relief, and there is some scientific backing for that claim. A [review of studies, published in *Current Rheumatology Reports* in November 2019](#), on qigong for musculoskeletal pain found that a consistent qigong practice soothed pain in varying degrees among adults with different forms of chronic pain, and with few side effects.

A [meta-analysis in the May 2018 *Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice*](#) of four randomized controlled studies involving 212 participants found that, on average, those who received reiki therapy reported [reduced pain](#) scores compared with control groups.

Improved Depression and Anxiety Symptoms

Energy healing may improve mood and even help with symptoms of depression and anxiety. A [2017 review](#) of 13 studies determined reiki was more effective than a placebo at reducing symptoms of depression and anxiety, as well as improving overall quality of life. A more recent [review, published in November 2021](#), of 10 studies involving more than 1,200 adolescents determined that qigong was effective at reducing depression and anxiety among teens.

[Danica Arizola](#), a licensed massage therapist and a reiki master teacher practitioner at Penn Medicine in Philadelphia, says in her experience, reiki may help with anxiousness because it can lead to a deeper level of inner listening and increase your inner knowing.

“Meaning, when you consistently take time to be quiet and still with yourself, over time a deeper level of intimacy is established within all aspects of the self — mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually,” she says. “When the body and mind are more at ease in a state of homeostasis, there is more opportunity and ability for healing.”

Enhanced Overall Well-Being

Those who practice energy healing techniques in a therapy session or on their own say one of the biggest benefits of the practice is that it induces a [state of deep relaxation](#), which can enhance overall well-being. “In my observations, energy healing [generally] relaxes a person, bringing them to a state of breath and peace,” says [Jennifer Izaguirre](#), a reiki master teacher and quantum energy healer.

One [larger, uncontrolled online survey study published in the *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine* in December 2019](#) involved 99 reiki practitioners and more than 1,400 reiki sessions. It found that even a single session led to significant improvements in overall well-being and other factors, like mood and pain.

May Help Cancer Patients

Energy healing is currently being studied in patients who receive cancer therapy to find out if it can improve quality of life, boost the immune system, or reduce side effects, according to the [NCCIH](#). Some forms of energy healing have been shown to have some benefits to cancer patients.

One [past study funded by the NCI](#) found that women with advanced breast cancer who received [reflexology treatments](#) showed improvement in some symptoms, like shortness of breath, and overall physical functioning (like physical capacity and exercise capacity, based on self-reporting).

Arizola says cancer patients are often receptive to energy healing practices like reiki as a way to promote a sense of security.

“I often hear clients speak about feeling disconnected from parts of their bodies, whether it’s because of surgery, tumor sites, or scar tissue,” she says. “Reiki is noninvasive, and there is no pressure or muscle manipulation involved in its application. Because of this, cancer patients who may feel overwhelmed by clinical procedures, being poked and prodded, may feel more inclined to gentle touch and/or hovering over tender areas.”

Energy Healing Safety and Side Effects

Since energy healing is noninvasive, it is generally considered very safe. As with any type of therapy, it’s important to notify the practitioner of any mental health or medical conditions so that they are informed, Blythe advises. And it’s also crucial to talk to your primary care provider ahead of time about any therapies you intend to seek.

“Energy healing is never a substitute for medical care or psychotherapy, but can often be used in conjunction with allopathic [conventional] treatments,” she notes.

While each person’s experience will be unique, Blythe explains that common sensations clients may feel during energy healing include:

- Tingling feeling throughout the body
- Emotional release
- Hot and cold sensations
- Muscle twitches or tremors
- Yawning or coughing
- Dizziness
- Seeing colors or images behind the eyes
- Deep relaxation
- Tiredness

Who Might Want to Try (and Avoid) Energy Healing

Energy healing is considered to be generally safe and may come with a number of health benefits, so if you’re curious about it, there should be no harm in giving it a try. That said, be sure to talk to your primary care provider or an integrative doctor before starting any new type of therapy.

“[Many people may] benefit from energy healing,” Izaguirre says. “There is no ailment, big or small, inside or out, that can’t somehow be touched by healing energy.”

Blythe notes that energy healing can be particularly helpful prior to and after surgery or other medical procedures, and for those who are experiencing pain, anxiety, or life changes.

“Reiki and other energy healing modalities are becoming a more common offering for hospital patients, and is certainly something [many] patients can benefit from,” she says.

As mentioned above, energy healing may cause some side effects some people might find unpleasant, such as dizziness, tiredness, or coughing.

“If any of these are experienced and cause concern, it’s important to reach out to the practitioner for support and advice on how to reduce or alleviate symptoms,” Blythe says.

Tips for Getting Started With Energy Healing

If you’re interested in giving energy healing a try, consider the following expert tips.

Do Your Research

Before you try energy healing, you’ll want to vet potential practitioners. Since most modalities don’t have a regulating body, try to look for practitioners with credentials like certifications, diplomas, or degrees from a school or course you find trustworthy, advises Izaguirre.

As the [University of Minnesota’s Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing](#) notes, a certificate is no guarantee that the practitioner has thorough training, so you’ll want to ask some questions, too, such as:

- What’s your level of training?
- When were you trained and how long were the classes?
- How do you describe energy healing?
- What’s your clinical experience?
- Can you describe your sessions, including length of time and fee?
- Do you practice energy healing every day?

[Lily Allen-Duenas](#), a reiki master healer and crystal healer based in Des Moines, Iowa, advises looking for practitioners with credibility who also have a personality you’ll connect with.

“If you’re looking for an energy healer, give their website a good look over,” she says. “Read about their philosophy and methodology. Notice, of course, when and where they were certified, but you’re also looking for how you feel they’ll treat you.”

Try Different Forms

There are dozens of different types of energy healing, so you may want to give a couple a try if the first one doesn’t feel like a good fit. Read about the different modalities and see what appeals to you. Then look up qualified practitioners in your area to see what’s available, or talk to an integrative doctor about possible recommendations nearby.

Be Open-Minded

Allen-Duenas notes that individuals who find the most benefit from energy healing are those who approach it with an open mind.

“If you are tense and closed-off, it is more difficult for energy to move through you,” she says.

What to Expect Before, During, and After an Energy Healing Therapy Session

What happens during an energy healing session will look different depending on what modality you’re engaging with. But generally, there are some things you can expect before, during, and after a treatment.

Before

Before your energy healing session begins, you’ll have a few minutes to chat with your practitioner to set expectations.

“A practitioner will typically ask the client what intentions they have for the session and if there are any particular concerns or imbalances they would like to release,” Blythe says. “There will often be an opportunity for the client to ask questions prior to the treatment itself, and the practitioner will provide an explanation of what the client can expect during a session.”

During

In many forms of energy healing your practitioner will ask you to lie on a massage table fully clothed at the start of the session. “Depending on the modality, the practitioner may touch certain areas of the body or hover their hands over the body without touch,” Blythe says.

It’s also common for your experience to change each time, she notes.

“The experience of the client is often different for each session and is directly influenced by their intention for the session,” Blythe says. “Some practitioners will talk during a session, others will remain silent, however it is always advisable to tell the practitioner if you are uncomfortable or have questions during a session.”

After

After an energy healing session is over, your practitioner will usually give you care instructions.

“These [often] include drinking plenty of water, resting, and eating something to help ground the body,” Blythe says. “The client may experience a continuation of energy clearing symptoms for an hour and up to several days after a session.”

What Does Energy Healing Cost?

The cost of energy healing can vary depending on type and practitioner.

“Charging for energy healing is strictly up to the practitioner, where they are located, overhead, and the time spent in a session,” Izaguirre says. “A professional practitioner may have spent hundreds or thousands of dollars on education, insurance, licenses, marketing, and other expenses.”

Blythe says most practitioners charge anywhere from \$75 to \$300 per hour, and other experts confirmed that range is normal.

Some practitioners may work with a sliding scale, and Izaguirre notes she has charged clients less than \$75 depending on what the client is seeking and has even done some sessions for free.

Energy Healing Resources We Love

Favorite Organizations for Info on Energy Healing

[National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health \(NCCIH\)](#)

The NCCIH is the United States government's leading agency for scientific research on complementary and integrative health approaches. Its mission is to use rigorous scientific investigation to determine the safety and efficacy of these methods of care. Check out the website for a breakdown of all [terms related to complementary and integrative health](#), as well as more in-depth information on energy healing modalities like [reiki](#), [qigong](#), and [acupuncture](#).

[University of Minnesota Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing](#)

The Earl E. Bakken Center for Spirituality & Healing aims to advance the health and well-being of individuals, organizations, and communities through integrative health and healing. On the center's website, you'll find essential info on many forms of energy healing, including [healing touch](#), [reflexology](#), [reiki](#), [shamanism](#), and [qigong](#), as well as [ayurvedic medicine](#). The center also [produces a podcast](#), [issues a biannual magazine](#), and has downloadable guides for students and nonstudents chock-full of tips and strategies to focus on well-being.

[Institute of Noetic Sciences \(IONS\)](#)

IONS is a nonprofit research institute started by a former NASA astronaut Edgar Mitchell, who has a [website](#) where you can dive deep into the diversity of these energy practices. IONS is supported by various researchers and groups and studies topics at the intersection of science and profound human experience. It's a good resource for learning more about the different kinds of energy healing practices, how they may be used and applied, and to stay updated on current and new research.

The Takeaway

Energy healing is a complementary approach with roots in ancient and traditional medicine. While scientific research is ongoing to determine its benefits, evidence suggests that certain forms of energy healing practices may help with pain, depression, anxiety, and overall well-being.

While the practice is generally considered safe, do your research before choosing a practitioner, and talk to your healthcare provider before starting any new type of therapy.

<https://www.everydayhealth.com/integrative-health/energy-healing/guide/>