

BACKGROUND ON REIKI: An Introduction

Reiki is a healing practice that originated in Japan. Reiki practitioners place their hands lightly on or just above the person receiving treatment, with the goal of facilitating the person's own healing response. In the United States, Reiki is part of complementary and alternative medicine (CAM). This fact sheet provides a general overview of Reiki and suggests sources for additional information.

Key Points

- * People use Reiki to promote overall health and well-being. Reiki is also used by people who are seeking relief from disease-related symptoms and the side effects of conventional medical treatments.
- * Reiki has historically been practiced as a form of self-care. Increasingly, it is also provided by health care professionals in a variety of clinical settings.
- * People do not need a special background to learn how to perform Reiki. Currently, training and certification for Reiki practitioners are not formally regulated.
- * Scientific research is under way to learn more about how Reiki may work, its possible effects on health, and diseases and conditions for which it may be helpful.
- * Tell your health care providers about any complementary and alternative practices you use. Give them a full picture of what you do to manage your health. This will help ensure coordinated and safe care.

History

The word "Reiki" is derived from two Japanese words: *rei*, or universal, and *ki*, or life energy. Current Reiki practice can be traced to the spiritual teachings of Mikao Usui in Japan during the early 20th century. Usui's teachings included meditative techniques and healing practices. One of Usui's students, Chujiro Hayashi, further developed the healing practices, placing less emphasis on the meditative techniques. An American named Hawayo Takata learned Reiki from Hayashi in Japan and introduced it to Western cultures in the late 1930s.

The type of Reiki practiced and taught by Hayashi and Takata may be considered traditional Reiki. Numerous variations (or schools) of Reiki have since been developed and are currently practiced.

Practice

Reiki is based on the idea that there is a universal (or source) energy that supports the body's innate healing abilities. Practitioners seek to access this energy, allowing it to flow to the body and facilitate healing.

Although generally practiced as a form of self-care, Reiki can be received from someone else and may be offered in a variety of health care settings, including medical offices, hospitals, and clinics. It can be practiced on its own or along with other CAM therapies or conventional medical treatments.

In a Reiki session, the client lies down or sits comfortably, fully clothed. The practitioner's hands are placed lightly on or just above the client's body, palms down, using a series of 12 to 15 different hand positions. Each position is held for about 2 to 5 minutes, or until the practitioner feels that the flow of energy—experienced as sensations such as heat or tingling in the hands—has slowed or stopped. The number of sessions depends on the health needs of the client. Typically, the practitioner delivers at least four sessions of 30 to 90 minutes each. The duration of Reiki sessions may be shorter in certain health care settings (for example, during surgery).

Practitioners with appropriate training may perform Reiki from a distance, that is, on clients who are not physically present in the office or clinic.

Uses

A 2002 national survey by the National Center for Health Statistics and the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) on adult Americans' use of CAM found that 1.1 percent of the more than 31,000 participants had ever used Reiki for health purposes. Adjusted to nationally representative numbers, this percentage means that at the time of the survey, more than 2.2 million adults in the United States had ever used Reiki.

People use Reiki for relaxation, stress reduction, and symptom relief, in efforts to improve overall health and well-being. Reiki has been used by people with anxiety, chronic pain, HIV/AIDS, and other health conditions, as well as by people recovering from surgery or experiencing side effects from cancer treatments. Reiki has also been given to people who are dying (and to their families and caregivers) to help impart a sense of peace.

Effects and Safety

Clients may experience a deep state of relaxation during a Reiki session. They might also feel warm, tingly, sleepy, or refreshed. Reiki appears to be generally safe, and no serious side effects have been reported.

National Institutes of Health, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

**NCCAM Publication No. D315 -- <http://nccam.nih.gov/health/reiki/>
Created April 2006, Updated July 2008**