

# An introduction to Reiki as an alternative therapy in care homes

Reiki is one of the many forms of complementary and alternative treatments gaining popularity throughout the world. Some residents may have benefitted from Reiki treatments before entering into a care home and may wish to continue their sessions. Several care homes may offer Reiki, either from an outside practitioner or a member of their staff who is trained in Reiki. Owing to its increasing use, it may be beneficial for care staff to understand the basics of Reiki so that they can explain the content and possible benefits of a treatment to a resident.

Reiki does not always involve touch, the practitioner can carry out the treatment by placing hands near the body rather than it being a 'hands-on' treatment. This may be a benefit to people who may not want to be touched, or who do not particularly understand reiki and what it entails. Reiki may therefore be more suitable and acceptable for residents than other alternative therapeutic treatments.

This article will introduce Reiki, explaining some of the techniques used and how care home residents and staff can benefit from its use.

## Understanding Reiki

Reiki is translated as 'universal life-force energy'. It is based on the idea that an unseen inexhaustible life-force flows through us and keeps us alive. Reiki practitioners do not attempt to identify the life-force, but believe this source of power exists on a 'higher dimension' than the physical world of which we are all part.

This life-force, also termed 'positive energy', is in a subtle form that can be accessed, channelled and transferred through the practitioner to the recipient.

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**Reiki is an alternative therapy that is gaining popularity in healthcare settings in the UK. Julie Swann introduces the principles of Reiki and how it can be used to complement other treatments for older people in care.**

When people's 'life-force energy' is low, they are more likely to become sick or feel stress. If the 'life-force energy' is high, the person is healthy and happy.

The International Center for Reiki Training (2008) comment:

**Reiki is a generic word in Japan, and is used to describe many types of healing and spiritual work.**

Although it is deemed a form of spiritual practice, there is no belief system attached to Reiki, so anyone can receive or learn to give a Reiki treatment (Reiki Association, 2008). The only prerequisite is the desire to be healed.

## The origin of Reiki treatment

Reiki is thought to have derived from Tibetan Buddhism (Stein, 2000) and is thousands of years old. It was re-discovered in the 19th century from Sanskrit writings by Dr Mikao Usui (1862–1926), a Japanese scholar (Quest, 2002). Usui is believed to have received the gift of Reiki during a 21-day retreat of mediation, fasting and prayer at the holy Mount Kurama

**Table 1.**

### A PRACTITIONER'S VIEW OF REIKI

'The Reiki energy that comes from a therapist can vary greatly. My Master Teacher has a phenomenal amount of energy-strength and I don't know anyone who has received a treatment from him who hasn't commented - one cannot help but feel it! When I give treatments, the general comments I receive are changes in temperature, particularly around any focal points that require healing (as in the case study) and a very gentle, peaceful, overall feeling of calm. Once I complete hands-on treatment, I generally end with a sweeping of Reiki into the aura; I am led to believe this is what caps the feelings of calmness. Often my clients do not want to move but would much prefer to curl into a ball and go to sleep for an hour!

The excellent news for Reiki therapists is that because the Reiki energy flows through us and out of our hands, we actually receive an energy boost too; it's great! Explaining the concept to sceptics that Reiki heals where it is most needed can be the hardest part. However, Reiki is more than a concept; it is a belief system that can have profound changes in a person's life - spiritually, mentally, emotionally and physically. Reiki energy targets these four interlinked areas. As therapists, unless we do a focused healing session, the Reiki energy goes to where it is most needed and we have no control over that at all. More often than not, it is believed by many that our mental and emotional states deeply affect our physical state so if the Reiki energy heals in these areas, clients should feel the differences physically without necessarily having any other forms of treatment. If a person does not believe in Reiki as a healing system, this can block the energy from entering a person's aura and so the treatment would be unsuccessful.'

Lezlee Marsden (2008), Reiki Master/Teacher



Image 1. A selection of stones, each attributed with different healing and energising characteristics

**Table 2.**  
**CASE STUDY**

A man in his early 40s suffered from an aching elbow (possibly a 'tennis elbow'), but did not want to take any prescribed medication from the doctor. Occasionally, the elbow gave him considerable pain and at other times it was more of a 'nagging toothache' sort of pain. I provided a Reiki treatment using an initial quick(ish) sweep of his body, spending short periods of time where I felt guided, and then focused purely on his elbow. He said at times the elbow tingled and at others it was as though cold air was focused on the area. After a few treatments, he said he felt the stiffness and pain in the elbow had reduced considerably. He moved away from the area before I finished the course of treatments, though was very keen to resume Reiki treatment with another therapist when established in his new home.

Lezlee Marsden (2008), Reiki Master /Teacher

near Kyoto in 1922. He developed the Usui System of Natural Healing (Usui Reiki Ryoho method), spending many years treating people before passing his knowledge to his student, Chujiro Hayashi. Reiki teaching was simplified by Hayashi and several Reiki Masters (Shinpi-den) were trained (Quest, 2002).

Hayashi healed a woman called Hawayo Takata and eventually taught her Reiki. She brought Reiki to the West around 1970 (Quest, 2002) and subsequently it became

internationally recognized as an aid to accelerate healing using a system of natural healing and 'harmonising energy'. It should be noted that Davis (2004) comments that there are 'very few controlled studies in scientific literature supporting the efficacy of Reiki healing'.

**Reiki practitioners**

Reiki practitioners undergo training including 'attunements', which are carried out by a traditional Reiki master. At an attune-

ment ceremony the Reiki master uses the Reiki symbols and other gestures in a prescribed way to create an 'energy pattern' around the recipient of the attunement. This process is said to entrain (or attune) their 'energy field' to the energies represented by the symbols. The attunement is permanent, and turns the recipient into a Reiki practitioner, but only if the Master uses the symbol for the 'subconscious'. If this symbol is not used the entrainment is temporary. Recently, these sacred symbols have become available on the internet and in books, much to the dismay of some practitioners.

**Chakras**

Reiki practitioners believe that a 'life-force' flows within the physical body through pathways called chakras, meridians and nadis' The seven chakras directly correlate with the physical body and lie in a central column from the top of the head to the coccyx. Chakras are thought to be instrumental in physical, mental, emotional and spiritual energies. Reiki concentrates on opening-up and aligning the centres, and encouraging vital life-forces (Ki or Prana) to flow freely through the chakras, enabling the processing of universal energies around and within us. By working positively with these energies, it is hoped to create a more 'holistic being' and create an 'aura of energy'.

**Preparation for a Reiki treatment**

Reiki can be a whole body experience, and wearing loose, comfortable clothing is suggested for the recipient. Lubeck (2003) also recommends that jewellery and quartz watches should be removed 'to eliminate positive interference in the flow of Reiki energy on its harmonising effect'. Any concerns raised by the resident should be passed on to the practitioner

**What happens in a Reiki session?**

Reiki is carried out with the recipient fully clothed, either seated or lying down. At the start of a session, the practitioner may spend time entering into a calm or meditative state of mind to mentally prepare for the treatment. This may be carried out in quiescence or by wafting a feather or incense stick (Image 3).

'Reiki energy' comes from above the practitioner's head and flows through the body and out through the practitioner's hands, which are placed on or near the client's body. Several positions are used around the head, the shoulders, the stomach, and the feet. Each position is held by the practitioner for three to ten minutes. A full Reiki treatment session lasts between 45 and 90 minutes and involves from 12 to 20 positions. As Reiki is a passive treatment and the recipients need not move, it can be used on residents who have limited range of movement and impaired mobility. Sessions can be carried out within a resident's room.

### Localized Reiki treatments

Reiki may focus on certain parts or certain problem areas. The intention of localized treatment is to release Reiki energy from the practitioner to the recipient, to activate the body's self-healing by 'freeing blocked energies and reducing negativity'. Recent injuries or diseases of organs can be targeted by the practitioner's hands, these being held on or near the injured or affected part of the body. As this is a specific area, only a shorter session of around 20 minutes is required. Many practitioners believe a holistic approach should be adopted and a whole body treatment provided, while other practitioners provide a full-body treatment followed by localized treatment.

### Variations of techniques

The time of a session can vary from 20 minutes to an hour. Techniques vary, with some practitioners using a fixed set of hand positions and a set routine before concentrating on specific areas as identified by the recipients. Others use intuition to guide them to places where treatment is required. Some practitioners start by scanning the body with their hands to locate areas of need, which can lead to variations in the duration of the treatment.

### Benefits of Reiki

As with other treatments, such as massage, the recipient can experience changes in body temperature or even a feeling of tingling in the area being treated, even when a non-touch approach is being adopted (Table 1). Reiki can induce a state of deep relaxation, often with a feeling of wellbeing

or a sense of being uplifted. The recipient may see auras or colours.

It is belief of those practising and receiving Reiki that it can stimulate natural healing processes, however, instant cures of specific health problems are not usually observed. It is used within many settings including residential and nursing homes, hospices, hospitals, prisons, GP surgeries, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centres, palliative care, private health centres and HIV/AIDS centres.

Several treatments, over a period of between one to seven days, are normally recommended if a chronic condition is being treated. Regular treatments may be useful to maintain wellbeing. Some practitioners can teach recipients to self-treat and, therefore, daily practice is possible.

Sometimes during a Reiki session it is believed that toxins stored in the body are released into the circulation and are filtered by the kidneys and liver before removal from the body. This cleansing and healing process can temporarily cause a headache, stomach-ache or a generalized feeling of tiredness or weakness. Drinking of non-caffeine liquids, such as water, is recommended directly after a Reiki treatment to aid filtering of any toxins that have been

released into the body.

Reiki is said to promote healing and is used to treat physical diseases including generalized aches and pains (Table 2). It could help people with emotional issues or mental health problems by reducing stress and aiding relaxation.

### Items used in Reiki

Practitioners sometimes use additional items to help to channel 'energy-forces', increasing or reducing 'energy'. Incense and feathers may be used to channel the 'forces' back into the recipient. *Image 1* show some of the stones used by Reiki practitioners. Some practitioners use crystals (*Image 2*) to accelerate healing according to the needs of the recipient. Some crystals are thought to 'intensify the energy' that the healer channels to himself or a client, creating a stronger healing 'vibration'. Other crystals dissolve 'negative energy' or purify an area of 'negative vibrations' while others can help to relax or 're-balance' a person's emotional state.

### Conclusion

Reiki is thought to be able to harmonize and balance the body on all levels and can be used for a wide variety of different ailments.



Image 2. Examples of crystals used in treatment

Reiki is a form of healing and the services of practitioners may be offered on a regular basis to care home residents. It is a long-established technique that can form part of additional treatments that are available to care home residents, but managers should ensure that the practitioner is qualified. **NRC**

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Quest P (2002) *Reiki for Life: The Complete Guide to Reiki Practice for levels 1, 2 & 3*. Judy Piatkus (Publishers) Ltd, London

Reiki Association (2008) Reiki. [www.reikiassociation.org.uk/3.html](http://www.reikiassociation.org.uk/3.html). RA, Haverfordwest

Stein D (2000) *Essential Reiki: A Complete Guide to an Ancient Healing Art 12th Printing*. The Crossing Press Inc, USA

### Further information

UK Reiki Federation  
Website: [www.reikifed.co.uk/pub/about/fed/contact.shtml](http://www.reikifed.co.uk/pub/about/fed/contact.shtml)  
Email: [enquiry@reikifed.co.uk](mailto:enquiry@reikifed.co.uk)

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### KEY POINTS

- **Reiki is a treatment that is gaining popularity in the Western world**
- **Care staff should have an understanding of what Reiki is and what happens in a Reiki session, especially if it is available for their residents**
- **After a Reiki treatment, a resident should be encouraged to drink non-caffeine liquids to aid filtering of any toxins that have been released during treatment**
- **Staff should be ware that residents may become very tired yet feel calm and relaxed after Reiki**

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