

BIOFIELD SCIENCE POCKET GUIDE

Biofield Therapies for Pain

What the Clinical Evidence Shows

Fast facts

- **Biofield therapies**, (also known as energy healing, often considered to include spiritual healing) have been practiced for thousands of years to address various health conditions and enhance well-being.¹
- Common biofield therapy practices include Reiki, Healing Touch, Therapeutic Touch, External Qigong, and spiritual/faith healing.
- Biofield therapies have become more popular, but the research around these practices and whether they are effective is still developing, and is not well understood.
- Researchers commissioned by the [The Subtle Energy Funders Collective \(SEFC\)](#) conducted and published a Scoping Review in 2024, updated again in January 2026, to better understand existing research on biofield therapies.¹
- Of the pain-related studies examined, most found evidence either partially or fully supporting the use of biofield therapies for pain outcomes.
- Therapeutic Touch was the most commonly used biofield intervention among pain populations and was consistently associated with positive outcomes across nearly all pain studies reviewed.

What is the current landscape of evidence?

Scoping Review researchers searched multiple databases for studies involving human participants receiving biofield therapy.¹ They identified and examined **418 clinical trials published through 2025, 67 of which focused on pain-related populations and conditions**, including persistent/chronic pain (n = 15), pediatric pain (n = 9), and fibromyalgia (n = 5), among others.

- Refer to the [published Scoping Review](#) to learn more about the Scoping Review process and how studies were identified.
- View the [interactive evidence map](#) to see more information about each clinical trial included in the scoping review. Filter by various categories (e.g., intervention, health condition, outcomes, study results) of interest and utilize the search bar for customized searches. The map will be updated annually and is a freely accessible, online resource.

What are biofield therapies?

Currently, there is no standard definition of biofield therapy (sometimes referred to as energy healing or energy medicine). This concept continues to evolve, and researchers and practitioners often modify the definition to align with their specific needs or practices.²⁻⁵ An overview of modalities evaluated in the Scoping Review can be found on page 6.

The SEFC utilizes the following definitions in this pocket guide:

Biofield

A massless field, not necessarily electromagnetic, that surrounds and permeates living bodies and affects the body.^{3,4}

Biofield Therapy

A nonphysically invasive and noninstrumental type of Consciousness-Based Healing Modality in which a practitioner explicitly works locally or remotely with another living system's (e.g., person, plant, animal, cell) biofield to facilitate a healing response.⁶



Consciousness-Based Healing Modalities (CBHM)

Practices and modalities that are thought to facilitate healing through shifts in consciousness or energy movement (whether perceived or not). Examples include energy healing, psychedelics, and meditation, among others.

What is the best clinical evidence?

Below is a summary of selected recently published articles with promising evidence for pain populations.

Reiki improved chronic knee pain

Study details: Reiki (4 x 30-minute sessions over 4 weeks) were provided to knee osteoarthritis patients. Five trained Reiki practitioners gave the sessions locally, hands-off. Results showed Reiki was similar to mindfulness and better than a waitlist control at improving the severity of knee osteoarthritis symptoms.⁷

This article will be added to the interactive evidence map in 2026.



Reiki reduced pain and supported immune response in bone marrow transplant patients

Study details: Reiki (3 x 30-minute sessions over 3 days) was provided to patients undergoing autologous bone marrow transplantation. A certified Reiki Master administered the intervention locally, hands-on and hands-off, directing energy to key energy centers during the first two days, followed by a distant Reiki session on day 2. Patients who received Reiki showed significantly lower pain scores than the control group on days 1 and 2, while pain in the control group continued to worsen. Reiki patients also showed a meaningful decrease in procalcitonin — a key marker of infection risk — suggesting a possible immune-supporting effect during the critical post-transplant period.⁸

This was a pilot study (n=21).



Gentle touch reduced fibromyalgia pain

Study details: Gentle touch (2 x 45-minute sessions over 45 days) was given to women with fibromyalgia. Two trained physiotherapists provided the intervention locally, hands-on. Results showed that gentle touch did not improve quality of life but was better than placebo at reducing pain scores.⁹



Healing Touch improved osteoarthritis pain and mobility

Study details: Healing touch (18 x 20-minute sessions over 6 weeks) were provided to osteoarthritis patients. Two certified Healing Touch nurses provided the intervention locally, hands-on. Healing Touch improved nearly all joint pain and mobility outcomes.¹⁰

This was a pilot study (n=19)



Reiki reduced chronic pain

Study details: Reiki (6 x 30-minute sessions over 2-3 weeks) were given to individuals with chronic pain. Four Reiki practitioners provided Reiki locally, hands-off. Results showed that Reiki reduced pain and interference with activities (e.g., general activity, walking), relationships, sleep, and enjoyment of life.¹¹

This was a pilot study (n=30).



Reiki improved rheumatoid arthritis pain and fatigue

Study details: Reiki (6 x 30-minute sessions) were given to people with rheumatoid arthritis. A trained Reiki practitioner initially provided treatment locally, hands-off before switching to distance sessions. Reiki successfully improved pain and fatigue.¹²



Spiritist passé reduced anxiety and improved functioning in knee osteoarthritis

Study details: Spiritist passé (laying-on-of-hands with a spiritual component; 8 x 5-minute sessions over 8 weeks) was provided to older women with knee osteoarthritis. Spiritist healers provided the sessions locally, hands-off. Results showed that people who received spiritist passé had better functioning and lower anxiety compared to people who either received laying-on-of-hands without a spiritual component or no treatment.¹³



Spiritist passé improved well-being and muscle tension in cardiovascular patients

Study details: Spiritist passé (3 x 10-minute sessions over 3 days) was given to cardiovascular inpatients. Spiritist healers provided the sessions locally, hands-off while non-practitioners gave a "fake" intervention to another group. Spiritist passé reduced anxiety and outperformed both a sham intervention and no treatment in improving muscle tension and well-being.¹⁴

This was a pilot study (n=41)



Therapeutic Touch reduced back pain

Study details: Therapeutic Touch (4 x 20-30 minute sessions over 1 week) were given to patients with back pain. Nine nurses provided the intervention locally, hands-off. Therapeutic Touch reduced disability and pain long-term.¹⁵



What are some next steps for researchers?

Research on biofield therapies continues to expand, but the evidence is still inconsistent. While this can mean that certain biofield therapies may be ineffective, it also can be a result of not enough research on a specific topic, or existing research that is not conducted or reported well. Inadequate reporting can make it difficult to understand or replicate results, which is important to build confidence in what the results are reporting.

- Exploring how specific biofield therapies work.
- Conducting randomized controlled trials, with a large number of participants, on specific conditions and populations to better understand which biofield therapies are effective and for what conditions and symptoms.
- Following recently developed [reporting guidelines for biofield therapies](#)¹⁴ to ensure biofield therapies are properly described to better understand the intervention and help with replicating trials.

Want to dive deeper into the latest research and future directions? Check out the [published scoping review](#) and explore our [interactive evidence map](#) for an engaging, easy-to-navigate overview of the research!

What are the different types of biofield therapies?

There are many types of biofield therapies ranging from more established to bespoke interventions. Below are some of the most common practices.

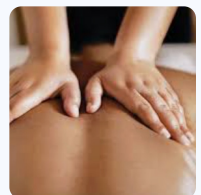
Reiki

Reiki is a form of energy healing originating in Japan in which a Reiki practitioner channels “universal life energy” to a recipient by lightly placing his or her hands either on or above a recipient’s body using a series of hand positions.¹⁷



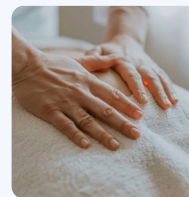
Healing Touch

Healing Touch is a form of complementary and alternative medicine based on the idea that vital energy flows through the human body and can be balanced or strengthened by practitioners who pass their hands over or gently touch a patient’s body.¹⁸



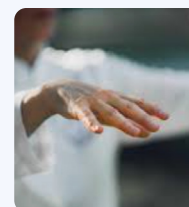
Therapeutic Touch

Therapeutic Touch is a form of energy healing that incorporates the intentional and compassionate use of universal energy to promote balance and well-being. Specifically, a healer will place his or her hands on or near a patient's body to detect and manipulate the healee's energy.¹⁹



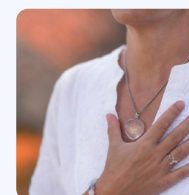
External Qigong

External Qigong is an energy healing practice in which qigong practitioners direct their qi, or life force energy, to a recipient to assist in clearing and balancing qi and relieving pain and/or other illnesses.²⁰



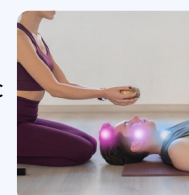
Brennan Healing Science

Brennan Healing Science is a specialized, non-invasive form of energy healing developed by Dr. Barbara Brennan that combines hands-on techniques with spiritual and psychological processes to balance, charge, clear, and repair the chakras and human energy field. It is grounded in the living dynamics of the Human Energy-Consciousness System and its relationship to health and disease.²¹



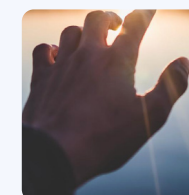
Integrative Energy Therapy

Integrative Energy Therapy is a holistic healing practice that combines multiple energy-based modalities. Such as Reiki, Healing Touch, and other biofield techniques within a single therapeutic session or treatment framework. A practitioner draws on several approaches simultaneously, tailoring the combination of techniques to the individual's needs to facilitate a comprehensive healing response across physical, emotional, and energetic dimensions.²²



Laying-on-of-hands/spiritual faith healing/spiritist passé

Laying-on-of-hands is a spiritual practice appearing in Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and other faith traditions that involves the placement of hands on an individual in conjunction with prayer to provide healing or blessings.²³



To learn more about the modalities included (or not included) in the scoping review, refer to scoping review's [published supplementary material](#).

How do Biofield therapies work?

How biofield therapies exactly “work” is still largely unknown. Current theories of mechanism include quantum mechanisms, biophotons, intention and suggestion, placebo, as well as unmeasured or unknown energy fields.²⁴

In general, many biofield therapy practitioners report they move, unblock, or act as conduits for “energy” (also often referred to as consciousness, spirit, qi, prana, mana, or ki in different traditions) to facilitate a healing process for or within the recipient. This can be done in a variety of different ways based on the following:

- **Hand placement:** on, off, or near a recipient
- **Practitioner location:** being in the same room as a recipient or in different physical area
- **Healing relationship:** self-led, pairs of individuals, or groups

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