

BIOFIELD SCIENCE POCKET GUIDE

# Introduction to Biofield Therapies

Best Evidence from Clinical Research

## 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.<sup>1</sup>
- 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.<sup>1</sup>
- The Scoping Review examined 418 clinical trials across a wide range of conditions and populations, and nearly half reported promising evidence supporting the use of biofield therapies.

## What is the current landscape of evidence?

Researchers systematically searched multiple databases for peer-reviewed studies involving human participants receiving biofield therapy.<sup>1</sup> In total, **418 clinical trials** were identified and examined across a broad range of health conditions and populations.

- Refer to the [published Scoping Review](#) to learn more about 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.<sup>2-5</sup> An overview of modalities evaluated in the Scoping Review can be found on page 5.

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.<sup>3,4</sup>

### 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.<sup>6</sup>



### 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 some recently published articles with promising evidence for difficult-to-treat conditions.

### Reiki for Chronic Knee Pain

**Study details:** Reiki was delivered in four 30 minute sessions over four weeks to adults with long lasting knee osteoarthritis pain. Reiki practitioners provided the intervention locally by holding their hands just above the body in set positions. Participants who received Reiki showed clear improvement in their knee pain symptoms. More than half of them went on to experience a meaningful reduction in symptoms, which is a greater level of improvement than most pain medications typically provide (based on similar studies involving pain medications). The pattern of improvement looked similar to the changes seen in the mindfulness group, an evidence based approach for chronic pain, and both groups continued to improve after the sessions ended.<sup>7</sup>



## Healing Touch may support healthier metabolism during cervical cancer treatment

**Study details:** Healing touch (4 sessions per week over 6 weeks) was provided to patients with cervical cancer undergoing chemoradiation. Three certified nurses provided the intervention locally, hands-on and hands-off. Blood samples analyzed throughout treatment showed that patients who received Healing Touch had distinct metabolic changes compared to those receiving relaxation training or standard care alone, suggesting a more flexible and resilient metabolism during chemotherapy — which may help the body better cope with the physical stress of treatment and support immune function during the critical post-treatment period.<sup>8</sup>

*This was a pilot study (n=44).*



## Biofield healing reduced fatigue and stress in breast cancer survivors

**Study details:** Hands-on healing (8 x 60-minute sessions over 4 weeks) was provided to breast cancer survivors with fatigue. Biofield healing practitioners provided the intervention locally, hands-on. Results showed biofield healing was more effective than a waitlist control in reducing cortisol slope (an indicator of stress) and fatigue.<sup>9</sup>



## Healing Touch and guided Imagery improves posttraumatic stress disorder

**Study details:** Healing Touch and guided imagery (6 x 60-minute sessions over 3 weeks) were provided to combat-exposed active-duty military service members. Nurses certified in Healing Touch provided the intervention locally, hands-on while participants listened to guided imagery audio that addressed trauma-related issues. Healing Touch and guided imagery was better than treatment as usual in improving, depression, and mental quality of life.<sup>10</sup>



## Reiki improves anxiety and stress

**Study details:** Reiki (single 20- to 25-minute session) was administered to patients before undergoing upper gastrointestinal endoscopy for anxiety, stress, and comfort. A trained Reiki practitioner provided the intervention locally, hands-off the patient. Reiki improved stress, anxiety, and patient comfort better than no treatment.<sup>11</sup>



## Spiritist passé improves pain, functioning, and anxiety

**Study details:** Spiritist passé is a Brazilian version of laying-on-of-hands that involves a spiritual component. It was provided locally, hands-off to older women with knee osteoarthritis (8 x 5-minute sessions over 8 weeks) and improved functional capacity, pain, anxiety, depression, mobility, and quality of life better than no treatment.<sup>17</sup> A separate study also found that spiritist passé (3 x 10-minute sessions over 3 days) was better than standard medical care in improving anxiety, muscle tension, and well-being.<sup>12</sup>



## Therapeutic Touch improves sleep

**Study details:** Therapeutic touch (4 x 15-minute sessions over 4 weeks) was administered to menopausal women. A Therapeutic Touch practitioner administered treatment locally, hands-off. Therapeutic Touch was better than no treatment at improving sleep quality, sleep disturbance, and sleep latency.<sup>13</sup>



## 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.

Future recommendations for research include:

- 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](#)<sup>14</sup> to ensure biofield therapies are properly described to better understand the intervention and help with replicating trials.

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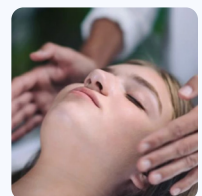
Want to dive deeper into the latest research and future directions? Check out the [published scoping review](#) and explore our [interactive evidence map](#) for an engaging, easy-to-navigate overview of the research!

## 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.<sup>15</sup>



## 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.<sup>16</sup>



## 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.<sup>17</sup>



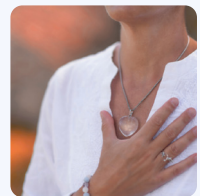
## External Qigong

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.<sup>18</sup>



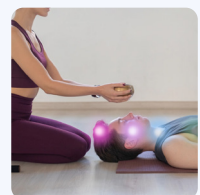
## Brennan Healing Science

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.<sup>19</sup>



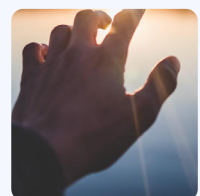
## Integrative Energy Therapy

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.<sup>20</sup>



## 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.<sup>21</sup>



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.<sup>22</sup>

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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