

BIOFIELD SCIENCE POCKET GUIDE

Biofield Therapies for Cancer Symptoms

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 cancer patient population examined, most found evidence partially or fully supporting the use of biofield therapies for cancer-related outcomes.
- Reiki was the most commonly used biofield intervention across the full review and was consistently associated with positive outcomes across nearly all cancer-related 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 up to 2025; 53 of these trials were on different cancer populations**; the most frequently studied populations included mixed-diagnosis adult cancer (n=13), breast cancer (n=9), pediatric cancer (n=5), and cervical/ ovarian cancer (n=4).

- 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 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.^{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?

Emerging evidence suggests biofield therapies may support cancer care by influencing cellular outcomes, such as stimulating bone formation and inhibiting tumor growth, as well as reducing common treatment side effects including nausea, fatigue, appetite loss, and depression.

Below is a summary of some recently published articles with promising evidence for difficult-to-treat conditions.

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, with a mix of hands-on and hands-off. Researchers analyzed blood samples throughout treatment for changes in metabolites — the chemical byproducts of how the body processes energy. Patients who received Healing Touch showed distinct metabolic changes compared to those receiving relaxation training or standard care, including lower levels of compounds linked to fatigue and inflammation — suggesting that Healing Touch may help the body better tolerate the physical demands of cancer treatment.⁷

This was a pilot study (n=44)



Biofield healing improved cortisol slope and fatigue

Study details: Eight 60-minute sessions of energy chelation (hands-on healing) were administered to breast cancer survivors with fatigue over four weeks. Four biofield healing practitioners provided the intervention locally, hands-on while four mock practitioners (e.g., scientists trained to use biofield hand placements without healing intention) provided a mock intervention. Results showed biofield healing was superior to both mock healing ($p > .04$) and a waitlist control ($p = .004$) in reducing cortisol slope. It also significantly reduced total fatigue compared to waitlist control ($p < .0005$).⁸



Spiritist passé improved depression, stress, and quality of life

Study details: A single 5-minute spiritist passé (i.e., laying-on-of-hands with a spiritual component) session was administered to oncology patients undergoing chemotherapy. Spirit healers provided the intervention locally, hands-off. Results showed spiritist passé improved depression ($d = 1.24$), nausea/vomiting ($d = 0.71$), stress ($d = 0.62$), and loss of appetite ($d=0.71$) symptoms compared to a control group and had fewer adverse events compared to laying-on-of-hands without a spiritual component ($p = 0.023$).⁹



Reiki reduced fatigue and pain

Study details: Eight 20-minute sessions of Reiki were administered to palliative care cancer patients with pain and fatigue over four days. One researcher provided the intervention locally, hands-on and hands-off. Results showed Reiki effectively reduced levels of pain ($p < .001$), analgesic use ($p < .001$), and fatigue ($p < .001$) compared to a rest group.¹⁰



Reiki improved fatigue and quality of life

Study details: Six 42-minute sessions of Reiki were administered to breast cancer patients receiving chemotherapy over three weeks. One Reiki practitioner provided the intervention locally, hands-on. Results showed Reiki significantly reduced fatigue ($p < .0010$) and improved quality of life ($p < .001$) compared to standard of care ($p < .001$).¹¹



Reiki improved anxiety, fatigue, nausea, pain, and well-being*

Study details: A single 15- to 20-minute Reiki session was administered to outpatients receiving infusion treatments. Reiki practitioners provided the intervention locally, hands-on and hands-off. Patients reported clinically significant improvements in pain ($p < .001$), fatigue ($p < .001$), anxiety ($p < .001$), nausea ($p < .001$), and well-being ($p < .001$).¹²



Therapeutic Touch reduced nausea

Study details: A single 15-20 minute Therapeutic Touch session was administered to breast cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy. A researcher provided the intervention locally, hands-off while another researcher provided a mock intervention. Results showed Therapeutic Touch was significantly more effective in delaying the onset of nausea compared with placebo and an undescribed control ($p < .001$).¹³



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!

**This was not part of the original scoping review, but is included because it is a recent, high-quality study.*

What are common 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.¹⁵



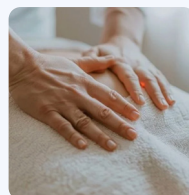
Healing Touch

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.¹⁶



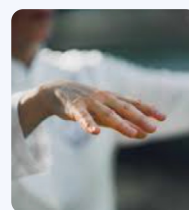
Therapeutic Touch

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.¹⁷



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.¹⁸



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.¹⁹



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.²⁰

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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