

The Healing Power of Touch -- And Seven Ways to Get More of It

For you it may be a back rub or a foot massage given by your spouse. Or you may love hugging your kids when they come home from school, or even snuggling up next to your pooch.

Whatever way you love to get it, physical touch should be an integral part of your life.

It's well-known, for instance, that babies who have skin-to-skin contact with their mother have better physical development and positive bonding.

The evidence on this is really astounding. Consider a study of Korean infants raised in an orphanage. The children who received an extra 15 minutes of a female voice, massage and eye-to-eye contact, five days a week for four weeks gained more weight, had greater increases in body length and head circumferences after the four weeks and at 6 months of age than children without the extra stimulation.

We need physical touch not only as babies, but also as adults. Studies have shown that therapeutic touch benefits adults in the following ways:

- Reduces stress (touching releases two feel-good brain chemicals, serotonin and dopamine)
- Lessens pain
- Reduces symptoms of Alzheimer's disease such as restlessness, pacing, vocalization, searching and tapping

How to Get More "Touch" Into Your Life

In the United States, many people reserve touching for their partner or spouse, and do it only in private. But even among couples, those in the United States aren't very "touch feely."

In fact, French couples spend three times more time touching than American couples, according to studies by Tiffany Field of the Touch Research Institute (TRI) at the University of Miami Medical School.

Of course, you also need physical touch even if you're single. Fortunately, romantic touching is only one of the many ways for you to get more touch into your life. The following methods can be used by anyone, at any stage of life, and whether you're single, married or somewhere in between.

1. Get a Massage

Massage therapy decreases stress hormones in your body, and according to TRI this may result in:

- Diminished pain from fibromyalgia and other sources
- Enhanced growth in pre-term infants
- Decreased autoimmune problems including better pulmonary function in asthma and lower glucose levels in diabetes
- Enhanced immune function including increased natural killer cells that help fight HIV and cancer
- Enhanced alertness and performance



Much of the healing power of touch has been linked to decreases in your body's stress hormones.

If you're giving or getting a massage at home, Surgeon's Skin Secret Moisturizing Sticks make a great, non-greasy massage oil that are completely natural (they contain only beeswax, lanolin and light mineral oil). Plus they come in eight delectable scents (we especially love the Light Lavender, Honey & Almond, and Berry scents).

2. Hug Someone

A study by University of North Carolina researchers found that hugs increase the "bonding" hormone oxytocin and decrease your risk of heart disease.

In fact, when couples hugged for 20 seconds, their levels of oxytocin, released during childbirth and breastfeeding, increased. Those in loving relationships had the highest increases, but that shouldn't stop you from hugging your more distant friends and acquaintances as well if the opportunity arises!

3. Go Out Dancing

Social dancing, the kind done cheek-to-cheek with your partner, gives you double benefits: those from touch and also from the physical activity.

Mayo Clinic researchers reported that social dancing helps to:

- Reduce stress
- Increase energy
- Improve strength
- Increase muscle tone and coordination

4. Get a Manicure or Pedicure

Almost all manicures and pedicures include a hand massage or foot massage. This will give you all the benefits of a full-body massage, but concentrate on two areas of your body that work really hard, yet are rarely given individual attention. Guys, you can do this one too!

5. Pet an Animal

Whether it's your own pet, or a friend's, petting an animal will take your mind off your worries and generally make you feel good. If you want to go a step further, owning a pet (and therefore getting to cuddle with it whenever you want), has been found to:

- Reduce depression
- Lower stress
- Improve your exercise habits
- Lower your blood pressure and cholesterol levels
- Lessen feelings of loneliness

6. Hold Hands

A 2006 study in Psychological Science found that holding hands calms nerves and provides relief from stress. The effect is strongest among happily married couples, but even holding a stranger's hand provided some stress relief.



Hugging increases bonding and even reduces your risk of heart disease!

7. Try Reiki

Reiki is a hands-on Japanese healing technique in which a practitioner channels healing energy through their hands and into your body. Reiki:

- Helps relieve pain
- Eases the symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Alleviates the symptoms associated with multiple sclerosis, lupus, fibromyalgia and thyroid goiter
- Promotes better sleep
- Reduces blood pressure

What is Reiki? The Benefits, Method and Background of This Universal Life Energy Technique Explained

Reiki, a Japanese healing technique, is gaining popularity in the United States as more and more people seek natural treatments for the mind and body.

Composed of two Japanese words -- Rei, which means "God's wisdom or the Higher Power," and Ki, which is "life force energy" -- reiki is often interpreted to mean "universal life energy."

This ancient form of energy healing is based on the idea that we all have an invisible "life force energy" (or Ki) that flows through our bodies and causes us to be alive. This energy, however, is often disrupted by our own negative thoughts and feelings (both conscious and unconscious ones). If your Ki becomes too low, you are at an increased risk of becoming stressed out, sick, tired and unhappy.

"Ki is flowing in everything that is alive including plants, animals and humans. When a person's Ki is high, they will feel strong, confident, and ready to enjoy life and take on its challenges. When it is low, they will feel weak and are more likely to get sick," says William Lee Rand, founder and president of The International Center for Reiki Training.

How Does Reiki Work?

Reiki (pronounced "ray-kee") is a gentle, hands-on technique in which a practitioner channels the healing energy through their hands and into the client.

The energy naturally flows where the negative thoughts and feelings are attached, thereby clearing any blockages and restoring a normal flow of energy. In other words, Reiki clears and heals the clouded energy pathways and allows the life force to flow through again.

"As Reiki flows through a sick or unhealthy area, it breaks up and washes away any negative thoughts or feelings lodged in the unconscious mind/body thus allowing a normal healthy flow of Ki to resume. As this happens, the unhealthy physical organs and tissues become properly nourished with Ki and begin functioning in a balanced healthy way thus replacing illness with health," Rand explains.



During a Reiki session the practitioner places his or her hands on or over the client's body, delivering healing energy that breaks up negative blockages and restores positive energy flow.

While it is possible to be born with the ability to use Reiki, most people must first be attuned to it (by training with an experienced Reiki Master) before they can channel it to someone else.

Reiki Benefits to the Mind and Body

Reiki is most commonly used as a tool for stress reduction and relaxation, but its benefits seem to extend much further. Scientific studies regarding Reiki are still few and far between, but those that have been done, along with a host of client testimonials, have found that Reiki:

- Helps relieve pain
- Eases the symptoms of depression and anxiety
- Alleviates the symptoms associated with multiple sclerosis, lupus, fibromyalgia and thyroid goiter
- Promotes better sleep
- Reduces blood pressure
- Instills peace in terminally ill cancer patients
- Creates deep relaxation in the body and helps relieve stress
- Supports the immune system
- Helps the body to rid itself of toxins
- Helps the body to recover after surgery and chemotherapy, and reduces some drug side effects



It's said that anyone can perform Reiki, but you first must be attuned to the energy by training with a Reiki Master.

"A treatment feels like a wonderful glowing radiance that flows through and around you. Reiki treats the whole person including body, emotions, mind and spirit creating many beneficial effects that include relaxation and feelings of peace, security and well-being. Many have reported miraculous results," according to the International Center for Reiki Training.

Meanwhile, the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) is sponsoring scientific studies to find out more about how Reiki works and how it may help with various diseases.

Where Can You Find a Reiki Practitioner?

Reiki is offered at many locations across the country, including hospitals for cancer patients, emergency rooms, nursing homes, hospices, OB/GYN units and health spas, but you can also find individual Reiki practitioners.

Though Reiki is thought to be safe, NCCAM suggests not using it as a replacement for conventional medical care, discussing the technique with your health care provider before proceeding and talking with the Reiki practitioner about their experience and/or training.