

Information on healing



This evidence based information sheet aims to provide clearly sourced and reliable information to help you make informed choices about the services that we offer. You may tell us how useful you have found this using the feedback forms provided. If you'd like more information on how to access the range of services we provide, please contact the helpline at the end of this information sheet.

Penny Brohn Cancer Care Opinion

We support this therapy and include it as part of the Bristol Approach <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	We support this therapy, but do not offer it as part of the Bristol Approach <input type="checkbox"/>	We do not support this therapy <input type="checkbox"/>
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In brief

Healing is a gentle and calming therapy suitable for people with cancer. It involves a light touch or hands held close to the body to realign and improve the free flow of energy around the body. It is non-denominational and is offered to promote wellness, generate balance and to activate the body's natural healing forces. Qualitative research shows that people with cancer find healing to be a positive experience. A small number of randomised controlled trials have looked at healing and show benefits such as a reduction in pain, increased relaxation and improvements in vitality and mood. Whilst more research is needed to confirm all these findings, Penny Brohn Cancer Care endorses healing as a safe and potentially beneficial therapy for people with cancer when carried out by an experienced, qualified healer.

Practitioner Perspective

"Although a belief that we all have a spiritual identity is inherent in all that we do at Penny Brohn Cancer Care, it is in the individual healing session that this comes under particular focus. This is a time of great peace in the company of an experienced healer. With a few words and a light touch they hold a tranquil and meditative space, allowing the stresses of life to fall away and a deep connection to the spirit within, which when restored can bring new meaning to life. Our approach is non-denominational, yet respectful of all faith and religions."

More information: What is healing?

Healing has been practiced around the world for thousands of years. Different cultures and religious traditions have developed methods that work with the concept of body on physical, mental, spiritual and emotional levels to promote healing, health and wellbeing. In our modern western context, healing tends to be

delivered by laying hands on the body, by placing hands just above the body, or by distant healing or prayer where the healer and client are in different locations.

In the United Kingdom, many healers work with the "vital force", often thought of as love and light. They aim to bring about balance in a person's "energy" field to allow their own healing abilities to do their work. It can be used to promote healing, peace, acceptance and wellbeing. Healing is generally non-denominational, respectful of all religions and does not expect the recipient to have faith or to be religious. These forms are often referred to as **Spiritual Healing** as they work with "spiritus vitae", the life force energy and breath, to affect the mind, body and spirit.

Healing may also be offered through various religious groups. For example some Quaker groups offer healing to anyone who wishes to receive it regardless of faith or belief. It is also offered by other Christian churches both in the form of prayer and 'laying on' of hands. It is also offered in some forms of Hindu and Unani practices.

In America, **Therapeutic Touch** was derived from ancient healing practices by nurse-healers Kunz and Krieger in the 1970s. **Healing Touch** evolved from Therapeutic touch in the 1980's through the work of Janet Mentgen. Both are based on the belief that energy flows around the body and that blocks or imbalances in this energy lead to disease. Both approaches scan the energy field around a person with the hands, and then perform the relevant technique to redistribute and unblock the flow of energy within the body to activate the individual's own natural ability to heal. Unlike therapeutic touch, spiritual healing incorporates ideas from other approaches, such as the traditional Indian concept of energetic or etheric "Chakras" or "subtle bodies".

Other popular forms of healing include **Reiki**, a Japanese form of spiritual healing based on the teachings of Dr Usui in the early twentieth century. Dr Usui believed everyone has the potential to use healing energy. This is activated through an "attunement" process, after which the person is able to give Reiki treatments to themselves and to others. It is non-denominational and distinct from other forms of spiritual healing.

What happens in a healing session?

Each healing session varies according to the individual practitioner and the approach they have been trained in.

Sessions can last from five minutes to an hour but are most typically approximately half an hour in length. A practitioner may start with some questions about health and wellbeing, before asking the client to sit on a chair or lie on a couch with the eyes closed, if wished. Clients remain clothed, but may take their shoes off. The practitioner will then begin working with energy according to the practice they follow. The practitioner may direct healing energy to areas of the body where they feel there is a need and work to dissolve energy blocks where tension or resistances are held. This improves the free flow of energy and brings about the balanced energetic state in which the body's own healing processes work best.

Healers work by either placing their hands on the body or by working with the hands at a small distance away. In the case of absence healing, healing energy is sent by intention to the person from great distances. Some practitioners use a fusion of methods and include elements of imagery and meditation techniques (for an explanation of these, please see our other evidence based information sheets).

During the session, the person receiving healing may experience light physical sensations such as tingling, pressure, warmth or gentle pulsing. Many people report that healing brings about a state of balance and calm, with an increased awareness of their own spiritual aspect.

The number of sessions required varies. Some people find that one session is beneficial enough, whilst others choose to return regularly. A practitioner may feel that a gap between sessions is needed to enable the treatment to work on as many levels as possible. To make the most of a healing session, healers advise some quiet time afterwards.

What are the providers' claims?

Healing is offered with the aim of bringing about balance and change on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. By restoring balance, personal vitality is increased and people find that their own natural ability to heal is supported and that they are more able to engage with their own healing process. Each person experiences this in their own way. Some may choose to make lifestyle changes and use other self-help techniques such as meditation as part of their healing.

Healing is thought to lead to long-lasting and wide-ranging benefits in life. It is not offered as a replacement for conventional treatments, but to work along side them. Benefits reported anecdotally include pain relief, uplift in physical well-being and emotions, relief from stress and depression and an increased sense of calm. It is thought that the immune system is supported, to both prevent disease and aid the healing process. Practitioners recommend it for living a fuller, more balanced life, and especially to help towards acceptance and peace at the end of life.

What do people who have had healing say about it?

Two qualitative studies have been found which look at the experiences of people with cancer when having healing or healing touch. Reported benefits include stress relief or prevention and improvements in overall wellbeing and emotional coping. Feelings of calmness, relaxation, security, comfort and awareness were also reported.

Are there any legal issues?

Within the UK there are a number of accreditation bodies with formal training, but no legal requirement to be qualified. However, as a result of the UK House of Lords Select 6th Scientific and Technology Committee Report on Complementary and Alternative Medicine (2000) many of the healer organisations are working towards Basic Standards of Good Practice. Please see "Useful Contact Details" below.

How much does it cost?

Increasingly, healing is being offered at hospitals and health centres where there may be no charge. Outside the health service, healing may be offered for donation or a low charge. Where offered privately and a charge is made, this can range from £10 to £30 per session.

What's the evidence?

In summary, studies suggest healing can help pain, improve mood, increase vitality and decrease anxiety. It has also been shown to be helpful at the end of life to improve well-being. However, the small amount of research and low quality of some

of the studies mean that more high quality research is needed before a clear conclusion about the benefits of healing for people with cancer can be reached.

Is healing safe?

There are no known adverse effects or contraindications, and healing is considered a safe complementary therapy for people with cancer when used alongside usual treatments and practiced by a trained healer.

Resources used

A full list of references used to write this sheet, including the research literature, is available upon request. Please call the helpline.

Other sources of information

Other organisations who offer information on complementary therapies:

- Foundation for Integrated Health. Web: <http://www.fih.org.uk>
- NHS National Library for Health. Web: <http://www.library.nhs.uk/cam>

Organisations that offer support and information for people with cancer:

- Cancer Research UK. Tel: 0207 009 8820, web: www.cancerresearchuk.org
- NHS Direct. Tel: 08 45 46 47, web: www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk
- Cancerbackup. Tel: 0808 800 1234, web: www.cancerbackup.org.uk
- Macmillan CancerLine. Tel: 0808 808 2020, web: www.macmillan.org.uk

National organisations that represent the therapy:

- Nation Federation of Spiritual Healers; Tel: 0845 123 2767
- UK Healers; Tel: 0113 2741028, web: <http://www.ukhealers.info/hh.htm>

Statement

Our information and research is designed to help you make informed choices about the services that we provide. From time to time, for illustrative purposes, we may make reference to commonly available products (such as relaxation CDs and popular self-help books). We do not endorse or advertise the use of any specific product.

If you have any questions please contact us

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