Healing

Healing is a gentle, supportive and calming therapy suitable for people with cancer. It involves either a light touch or hands held close to the body, to realign and improve the free flow of ‘energy’ around the body. It is offered to promote wellness, generate balance and to activate the body’s ‘natural healing forces’.

A small number of studies have looked at healing, with the most consistent evidence showing improvements in cancer related pain, combined with feelings of relaxation and comfort.

Whilst more research is needed, Penny Brohn Cancer Care considers healing a safe and potentially beneficial therapy for people with cancer, when carried out by an experienced, qualified healer.
Information on healing

This evidence based information sheet aims to provide clearly sourced and reliable information to help you make informed choices about healing, one of a range of complementary therapies available to support people with cancer. If you would like more information on how to access the range of services Penny Brohn Cancer Care provides, please contact our Helpline on 0845 123 23 10. We are able to provide our services free of charge, thanks to the charitable donations and voluntary contributions which fund our work.

Penny Brohn Cancer Care opinion

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<th>We support this therapy and include it as part of the Penny Brohn Whole Person Approach</th>
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Practitioner perspective

“A key part of our services looks at the spiritual aspect of the cancer journey. This therapy offers 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 faiths and religions.”

More information: What is healing?

Healing has been practised around the world for thousands of years and is linked to both Eastern and Western traditions. In our modern Western context, healing is usually 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.

Many healers work with what they call a ‘vital force’, often thought of as love and light. They aim to bring about balance in a person’s ‘energy’ field to allow that person’s own healing abilities to work. It can be used to promote healing peace, health, 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.

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 1980s 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. Another popular form of healing is Reiki, a system of natural healing from Japan, devised around 100 years ago by Mikao Usui. Mikao Usui enabled healing ‘energy’ to be available to everyone via a system of ‘attunement’ or ‘initiation’.
What happens in a healing session?

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

- Sessions can last from five minutes to an hour.
- The practitioner may start with some questions about health and wellbeing.
- Treatment can be carried out sitting on a chair or lying on a couch.
- Clients keep their clothes on but may take their shoes off.
- 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 distant healing, ‘healing energy’ is sent by intention to the person from great distances.
- 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 spirituality.

What are the providers’ claims?

(Please note that these are not the claims of Penny Brohn Cancer Care)

Healing is offered with the aim of bringing about balance and change on physical, mental, emotional and spiritual levels. By restoring balance, it is thought that personal vitality is increased, which supports the body’s natural ability to heal. Healing is not offered as a replacement for conventional treatments, but to work alongside them. Benefits reported anecdotally include improvements in physical wellbeing and emotions, relief from stress, depression and anxiety. It is sometimes offered to people with cancer to help with the relief of nausea, pain and fatigue. 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 tried healing say about it?

Research studies known as qualitative studies ask people about their experiences. They can tell us what having a therapy was like for the people involved in the study, but can’t tell us if a therapy is likely to work for everyone (this is dealt with in the section “What is the evidence?”).

Three qualitative studies have been found, which look at the experiences of people with cancer when having healing or therapeutic touch. Reported benefits include increased energy and wellbeing and feelings of calmness, warmth and relaxation.

Is healing safe?

There are no known adverse effects and healing is considered a safe and non-invasive complementary therapy for people with cancer, when used alongside usual treatments and practised by a trained healer.
What is the evidence on healing?
Recent research has demonstrated that healing may be particularly beneficial for cancer-related pain. There is too little evidence to draw conclusions regarding other physical and psychological outcomes. Much more high quality research is needed.

This is a summary of research findings. A full list of references and an extended summary of the research literature is available upon request from our Helpline.

Other sources of information

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<th>Organisations that offer support and information for people with cancer</th>
<th>More information on complementary therapies</th>
<th>Organisations that represent healing</th>
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<tr>
<td>Macmillan Cancer Support  Tel: 0808 808 0000  <a href="http://www.macmillan.org.uk">www.macmillan.org.uk</a></td>
<td>CAMLIS  <a href="http://www.cam.nhs.uk">www.cam.nhs.uk</a></td>
<td>The Healing Trust  Tel: 01604 603247  <a href="http://www.thehealingtrust.org.uk">www.thehealingtrust.org.uk</a></td>
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<td>NHS Direct  Tel: 111  <a href="http://www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk">www.nhsdirect.nhs.uk</a></td>
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<td>Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council  <a href="http://www.cnhc.org.uk">www.cnhc.org.uk</a>  Tel: 020 7653 1971</td>
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Contact us:
Helpline 0845 123 23 10 (Weekdays 9.30am to 5.00pm, 24-hour answerphone)  Email: helpline@pennybrohn.org  Address: Penny Brohn Cancer Care, Chapel Pill Lane, Pill, Bristol, BS20 0HH

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.

Disclaimer:
While we make every effort to use up-to-date and reliable sources, we cannot accept liability for errors in the sources that we use and also cannot guarantee to find all the information relevant to your enquiry or request. All responsibility for interpretation of and action upon that information rests with you. This information and advice is offered on the understanding that if you intend to support your treatment with complementary or alternative approaches then it is advisable to consult your medical team to ensure that they have a complete understanding of your situation and the complementary or alternative approach that you are considering.