

LIFESTYLE



MAGIC TOUCH

There's a lot to be said for touching yourself. That may be why reiki, a 200-year-old Japanese healing technique, is becoming the hottest fast-track therapy around. Even those who normally laugh in the face of complementary medicine are using reiki these days to help cope with everyday ailments, to destress, feel more "centred", sleep better and even find their soulmate. Converts say it's like putting the reins of life back into their own hands. Even scientists are beginning to acknowledge that there may be something in it.

Reiki is a hands-on healing system that involves channelling a flow of energy in order to activate the body to detoxify, heal and rebalance itself. It's based on the eastern premise that every living thing has an energy system (known as chi) and that blockages of this energy in the human body can lead to illness, disharmony and distress.

Its foundations lie in long-forgotten healing practices of Tibetan Buddhism that were rediscovered and revived by a Japanese theologian, Dr Mikao Usui, in the late 19th century. The idea is

Is reiki hocus-pocus, or a remarkable route to physical and spiritual wellbeing using nothing more than the hands? LULU BAKER investigates

that reiki practitioners act as a conduit for this "life force" energy (the name is derived from the Japanese words *rei*, universal, and *ki*, energy) into their patients by laying their hands on or above the body.

The energy, it is said, works on an atomic level: it makes the body's molecules vibrate so that these "blockages" are dissolved. While no formal medical studies have been conducted into reiki to date, some doctors believe it belongs to the long-overlooked science of energy medicine.

Recipients proclaim the effects are dramatic.

Take Caroline Baxter, fashion editor of *Cosmopolitan* magazine. Since she started having reiki healing 12 months ago, she has lost nearly 2st in weight ("It just started dropping off after my first session"), feels happier and more fulfilled and says she's no longer plagued by work stress. "It's transformed the way I see work and relationships — everyone tells me I seem more focused and confident. It's like I'm completely in control of my own life: I eat what my body wants →

MICHEL CHRISTIAN

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⇒ and take care of myself, which is why I lost weight."

Baxter learnt a particular kind of reiki, known as Tera-mai Seichim, dispensed by Samantha Beaumont-Collins, a leading London-based practitioner. Her list of clients includes, as well as glossy-magazine editors, intensive-care babies, cosmetic surgeons, divorcees, Alzheimer's patients, even a horse (a champion show-jumper).

"Tera-mai reiki is a form of mega-energy healing that works on the emotional and spiritual levels as well as the physical," says Beaumont-Collins. "It's about balancing a person's energy field to replenish their emotional and physical wellbeing."

Think of it as a "spiritual detox": once you are balanced inside, so the theory goes, your life will fall into place: you'll find yourself in the right place, with the right job, among the right people, even going out with the right person.

Beaumont-Collins's approach is to teach her clients to become conduits of this energy — rather than just administer to them — through the process of "attunement", so they can, effectively, sort themselves out.

She gives one-to-one sessions or two-day group courses where she instructs clients on the principles of reiki, carries out hands-on healing and uses meditations and visualisations to clear the chakras, which are believed to be the key points through which the body absorbs energy from the environment. Each of the seven chakras relates to a different aspect of mind and body health.

Afterwards you will be able to calm, heal or focus yourself by laying your hands on your own body, or channel this life energy to others physically, even absently. You are, in short, a healer.

Practitioners of reiki believe the body absorbs energy through the seven chakras

Cynics may scoff "hocus-pocus", but if anyone can channel higher energies, it's Beaumont-Collins. She's apparently been psychic since she was a little girl ("Spirits used to walk in and out of my bedroom — terrifying") and works with the police to find missing persons and help with murder cases. She has been evangelical about reiki since she first met her teacher and mentor, Geoff Boltwood, a renowned healer and author of *The Messenger* (published by Piatkus). "What I learnt from him is the importance of self-empowerment, in people taking control of their own lives

and dealing with the stuff that holds us all back," she says.

Alice Harrow, a 41-year-old mother of two, claims reiki gave her the strength and determination to leave an unhappy 10-year marriage. "Our relationship had effectively been over for years, and my attempts to discuss it, or salvage it, had always fallen on deaf ears. As a result of the stress and unhappiness, I developed severe gastritis." After seeing Beaumont-Collins on TV's *This Morning With Richard and Judy*, Harrow tried reiki. "Within a week I'd filed for a divorce. My husband was amazed. My friends were amazed. I was amazed. I just found courage and strength from somewhere. Months later my gastritis had gone — and even my doctor can't explain it."

Neither can science — yet, although heat-sensitive photographs of a practitioner's hand taken before and after treatment have apparently shown an intensification of heat during the healing. Besides, thanks to the theories of physicists such as the Nobel prizewinner Carlo Rubbia, who maintains that only a billionth part of the world is matter and that the rest is energy, conventional perceptions of the body are changing.

Dr Keith Scott-Mumby, a British allergy specialist and author of *Virtual Medicine* (Thorsons £9.99) says: "Science is proving that we exist as regulated and informed energy. Disease can now be redefined as a disruption, cessation or distortion in the information and energy fields. It's time for medical practitioners to join the party."

If you want scientific proof, you may be in for a wait. Then again, chances are most people — scientists, reiki masters and cynics alike — would agree that the key to wellbeing tends to lie in someone's hands. Usually your own.

SPIRITUALITY

INTUITION

SELF EXPRESSION

EMOTIONS

PERSONAL POWER

SEXUALITY

PHYSICAL HEALTH

