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## Review Article

# A narrative review of the impact of reiki and therapeutic touch on sleep quality and health in women

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### Highlights

- Reiki and Therapeutic Touch improve sleep quality and reduce stress in women.
- Safe, low-cost energy therapies restore balance and enhance mental and physical health.
- Complementary practices support well-being without side effects in clinical settings.

### Abstract

**Aim:** This review aimed to evaluate the application methods of energy therapies, specifically Reiki and Therapeutic Touch, their health effects, and their positive impact on sleep quality, particularly in women.

**Results:** Energy therapies are holistic approaches designed to restore energy balance and enhance overall health. Reiki, one such therapy, utilizes universal energy flow to promote physical, mental, and spiritual harmony. By balancing energy centers, Reiki helps alleviate stress, anxiety, and depression while being a generally safe practice with no reported side effects. Studies involving menopausal women suggest that Reiki improves sleep quality, reduces the time to fall asleep, and stabilizes sleep patterns. Therapeutic Touch focuses on sensing and balancing the body's energy fields, operating on the principle that energy imbalances contribute to illness. Research indicates that Therapeutic Touch alleviates stress, fatigue, anxiety, and pain, while enhancing sleep quality, relaxation, and overall quality of life. Studies in menopausal women confirm its effectiveness in addressing sleep disturbances and promoting well-being.

**Conclusion:** Energy therapies like Reiki and Therapeutic Touch are low-cost, side-effect-free complementary practices suitable for both individual and clinical use. They demonstrate effectiveness in improving women's physical and psychological health, enhancing sleep quality, and supporting overall well-being.

**Keywords:** Reiki, sleep quality, therapeutic touch, women's health.

## Introduction

Energy therapies are holistic health approaches aimed at restoring the body's energy balance and supporting the healing process (Rogers et al., 2021). These methods, gaining increasing attention within both traditional and complementary medicine, are preferred by individuals and healthcare professionals alike due to their low cost, safety, and non-invasive nature (Rao et al., 2016).

These therapies are based on the belief that the human body possesses energy fields, and that imbalances within these fields can negatively impact physical, mental, and spiritual health (Matos et al., 2021; Rogers et al., 2021). The goal of energy therapies is to reorganize and restore the flow of energy by addressing blockages within these fields, thereby improving overall health (Rogers et al., 2021). Among the most widely used energy therapy methods are Reiki and Therapeutic Touch. Reiki works by directing universal life energy to an individual's energy centers to promote balance and relaxation (Doğan, 2018). Therapeutic Touch, on the other hand, facilitates healing by intervening in the individual's energy field through the hands (Pinar & Demirel, 2021).

Recent research suggests that energy therapies are effective in various areas, such as pain management,

stress reduction, and alleviating psychological issues like anxiety and depression. In the domain of women's health, these therapies have demonstrated positive effects on common concerns, including menopausal symptoms and sleep disturbances (Çalışkan & Cerit, 2021; Chaudhary & Kumar, 2012; Yalcinkaya & Gozuyesil, 2024; Yeşil & Bakar, 2024). Consequently, exploring the role and impact of energy therapies in healthcare is believed to offer valuable insights for nursing practice.

This review aims to examine the fundamental principles, application methods, and health effects of energy therapies, with a particular focus on their contribution to sleep quality in women.

### Energy therapies

According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH), energy therapy is a healing method designed to restore the energy balance and health of individuals (NCCIH, 2015). Based on the belief in a universal flow of healing energy, energy therapy involves the practitioner transferring healing energy to another individual's body (Joyce & Herbison, 2015; NCCIH, 2015; Rao et al., 2016). During the process, the practitioner addresses blockages in the body's energy centers, promoting physical and mental healing, as well as emotional and spiritual

balance. Furthermore, these therapies enhance immunity and positively influence other bodily functions by triggering the relaxation response, which counteracts the neuroendocrine stress response (Satija & Bhatnagar, 2017). The literature supports that energy therapy provides various benefits, including increased comfort and improved recovery rates (Badakhsh et al., 2021; Stone, 2021). Energy therapy is categorized within traditional and alternative medicine and is recognized as a primary health care service (NCCIH, 2015; Rao et al., 2016). The National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) divides energy therapy into five groups: Healing Touch (HT), Qigong, Polarity Therapy, Reiki, and Therapeutic Touch (Coakley & Barron, 2012)

HT, which is rooted in ancient Eastern healing practices, is specifically used to restore energy disrupted by mental disorders (such as stress, anxiety, and depression) and the effects of cancer treatments (chemotherapy, surgery, radiation) (Coakley & Barron, 2012; Gentile et al., 2021). Qigong, an ancient Chinese practice, promotes physical and mental harmony by combining body movement, mind guidance, and breath control. Research indicates that it can improve quality of life by reducing symptoms of depression (Dong et al., 2021; Xie et al., 2020). Polarity Therapy, based on the principle of energy flow between two opposite poles, aims to enhance the individual's life energy by addressing blockages through hand placements on specific body centers. The goal is to allow energy to flow freely, helping to resolve health issues.

The benefits of these therapies include reductions in pain, fatigue, anxiety, and stress, as well as improvements in mood, general well-being, and quality of life (Satija & Bhatnagar, 2017). Consequently, studies emphasize the need for increased energy therapy interventions and funding allocations (Badakhsh et al., 2021; Coakley & Barron, 2012).

### **Reiki therapy**

Reiki, one of the energy-based healing approaches, was first discovered in Sanskrit texts by Dr. Usui in the late 19th century and later brought into practice by Hawayo Takata (Doğan, 2018; Hauptmann et al., 2023). Reiki is founded on the belief that everything in the universe, including the human body, is composed of energy, and that imbalances in this energy can lead to diseases and disorders. Along with universal energy, Reiki also emphasizes the presence of spiritual wisdom within humans, waiting to be awakened. In Reiki practice, the practitioner attempts to restore balance by channeling energy received from the universe into the individual (Doğan, 2018).

Reiki practice is divided into three levels: first, second, and master levels. At the first level, practitioners learn to balance their own energy. At the second level, they can send Reiki energy to others. At the third level, the mastery level, practitioners are trained to teach and pass on the practice to others. Reiki practitioners can also treat themselves, as well as animals and plants. A practitioner begins their journey with the first level. Properly trained Reiki therapists create an energy channel for the seven main chakras of the body by placing their hands directly on or a few centimeters

above the patient's body (Doğan, 2018; Hauptmann et al., 2023).

The duration of a Reiki session typically lasts between 30 and 90 minutes. During the session, the recipient remains in a lying or extended position, and there is no need to remove clothing (Hauptmann et al., 2023).

Reiki is generally considered safe, and no significant side effects have been reported. In recent years, there has been growing interest in energy therapies, including Reiki, among both consumers and healthcare providers, according to data from the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH, 2015).

Reiki practice has gained popularity among healthcare professionals, especially nurses. It is widely used in rehabilitation units, hospitals, emergency care units, psychiatric clinics, operating rooms, elderly care facilities, pediatric clinics, and gynecology clinics. With its hands-on approach and natural healing methods, Reiki is seen as a natural extension of nursing practice, offering nurses an opportunity to foster optimal care and healing (Doğan, 2018; Lipinski & Van De Velde, 2020).

### **Therapeutic touch therapy**

Therapeutic Touch is based on the assumption, developed at New York University, that the therapist can use their hands to perceive and harmonize the human energy field, which extends beyond the physical body (Doğru et al., 2021). This practice is thought to enable the conscious direction of energy (Hauptmann et al., 2023). The core concept of Therapeutic Touch therapy is grounded in the belief that "life energy" is a vital force present in all living beings, and that this energy flows in and around the body (Doğru et al., 2021).

Therapeutic Touch aims to regulate, increase, balance, and protect energy to promote healing from diseases or symptoms caused by imbalances in the energy fields (Pinar & Demirel, 2021; Rogers et al., 2021; Yalcinkaya & Gozuyesil, 2024). Touch itself is a basic human need and serves as a profound method of emotional expression (Rogers et al., 2021). Communicating through touch is simple, honest, and direct; thus, it can enhance physiological health by providing physical, emotional, and spiritual relief. This form of therapy helps patients feel valued, fosters trust, peace, and tranquility, and contributes to an increase in self-esteem (Pinar & Demirel, 2021).

Therapeutic Touch is a holistic, evidence-based practice that involves the intentional and compassionate use of universal energy to promote balance and well-being (Çalışkan & Cerit, 2021; Hauptmann et al., 2023). It is particularly well-suited for independent nursing practice due to its safety, lack of side effects, ease of learning and practice, and international recognition (Doğru et al., 2021).

### **The effect of Reiki and Therapeutic Touch therapy on sleep quality in women**

Energy therapies are known to reduce tension and anxiety, aiding in the resolution of psychological and emotional problems. These therapies are also reported to improve sleep patterns and reduce fatigue (Rogers et al., 2021). The concept of Therapeutic Touch is rooted in the belief that "life energy" is a fundamental force present in all living beings, and that this energy flows within and

around the body (Çalışkan & Cerit, 2021; Yalcinkaya & Gozuyesil, 2024). Imbalances or disruptions in this energy field, caused by diseases or symptoms, can lead to blockages or distortions, affecting its natural rhythm (Bağcı & Çınar Yücel, 2020; Ünal Aslan & Çetinkaya, 2022). Therapeutic Touch is a simple, noninvasive treatment that carries no cost, side effects, or negative interactions with medical treatments, offering supportive benefits in the healing process (Bağcı & Çınar Yücel, 2020).

Studies examining the impact of Therapeutic Touch on sleep quality have shown promising results. In one study focused on menopausal women, Therapeutic Touch was found to be effective in improving sleep quality (Yalcinkaya & Gozuyesil, 2024). Similar studies have reported an increase in sleep quality following Therapeutic Touch therapy (Bağcı & Çınar Yücel, 2020; Çalışkan & Cerit, 2021; Doğru et al., 2021; Ünal Aslan & Çetinkaya, 2022).

Reiki, a vibrational healing practice within bioenergy techniques, promotes harmony between the physical, mental, spiritual, and biofield aspects of the individual. Reiki is known for its positive effects on sleep quality, including a reduction in the time it takes to fall asleep, fewer nightmares, and an increase in sleep duration (Costa et al., 2022). In a study investigating the effect of Reiki on menopausal symptoms, it was noted that Reiki therapy may help reduce symptoms, including sleep disturbances (Yeşil & Bakar, 2024). Another study found that a combination of Reiki and acupressure was significantly effective in reducing insomnia and its associated symptoms in female patients (Chaudhary & Kumar, 2012). Similar studies have consistently reported improvements in sleep quality following Reiki therapy (Arıkan & Turan, 2024; Costa et al., 2022).

#### *The effect of Reiki and Therapeutic Touch therapy on health in women*

Reiki and Therapeutic Touch, both energy therapies, are recognized for their significant role in improving overall health (Stone, 2021). For women's health specifically, these therapies contribute to promoting a healthy pregnancy, a smooth birth process, and general well-being (Bondi et al., 2021).

One study highlighted the beneficial effects of Therapeutic Touch on various symptoms such as stress, depression, anxiety, pain, vomiting, fatigue, and sleep disorders, in addition to improvements in blood pressure, heart rate, comfort, and overall quality of life (Doğru et al., 2021). Therapeutic Touch has also been found to positively influence mood indicators in women, alleviating negative emotional symptoms (Roy, D., & Kar, 2019). In a study conducted in Isfahan, Iran, examining the effects of Therapeutic Touch on nausea caused by acute chemotherapy in women with breast cancer, it was reported that this therapy helped reduce stress, anxiety, fatigue, and alleviated premenstrual symptoms (Matourypour et al., 2015). These findings emphasize that Therapeutic Touch has a positive impact on mental health by enhancing the comfort levels of women (Stone, 2021).

Furthermore, in a study on the effect of Reiki on pain and anxiety in women hospitalized for obstetric and gynecological conditions, it was found that Reiki had a positive and lasting effect, reducing anxiety levels in

women (Bondi et al., 2021). Pain following a cesarean section can negatively impact a mother's well-being, mental health, and her relationship with the newborn. Reiki, as one of the complementary alternative therapies, has been reported as a viable alternative for managing post-cesarean pain and may be effective in strengthening maternal attachment by positively affecting the mother's mental health (Zimpel et al., 2020).

#### **Conclusion**

Energy therapies, particularly methods like Reiki and Therapeutic Touch, have garnered attention for their positive impact on women's health and overall well-being. These noninvasive, safe, and low-cost practices have shown promise, especially in areas such as sleep quality, stress management, and the alleviation of menopausal symptoms. However, the limited scientific literature in this field necessitates further research to solidify their efficacy.

- Energy therapies have demonstrated positive effects on sleep quality, stress management, and menopausal symptoms.
- These therapies can be considered as a complementary method within holistic health approaches.
- The gaps in the current literature highlight the need for more comprehensive, controlled studies to conclusively prove the efficacy of energy therapies.

#### Recommendations:

- Theoretical and practical training on energy therapies should be integrated into nursing education programs to enhance awareness and application.
- Randomized controlled trials should be conducted to investigate the effectiveness of energy therapies across different age groups and health conditions.
- Research on women's health should focus specifically on the effects of energy therapies on sleep quality and menopausal symptoms.
- Public awareness of energy therapies should be increased, and their integration into healthcare systems should be facilitated.
- Energy therapies should be recognized as complementary treatment options in health institutions, contributing to patient satisfaction and stress management.

This conclusion underscores the importance of further research and integration of energy therapies into both academic curricula and healthcare settings to maximize their potential benefits for women's health.

#### *Ethics approval statement*

We declare that this study is one of those that do not require ethics committee approval.

#### *Patient consent statement*

N/a.

#### *Consent for publication*

N/a.

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C. Ađralı: Concept, Design, Supervision, Consultancy, Data collection and/or data processing, Analysis and interpretation, Literature search, Writing of the article, References, Critical review.

**Data availability statement**

N/a.

**Declaration of competing interest**

There are no conflicts of interest between the authors.

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