

Touch therapies may have a modest effect in pain relief

Clinical question	How effective are touch therapies (Healing Touch, Therapeutic Touch and Reiki) in relieving acute and chronic pain?
Bottom line	Touch therapies may have a modest effect in pain relief. Participants receiving touch therapy had an average of 0.83 units (on a 0 to 10 scale) lower pain intensity than participants not receiving this therapy. Results of trials conducted by more experienced practitioners appeared to yield greater effects in pain reduction. The trials yielding greater effects were from the Reiki students. Two of the 5 studies calculating analgesic usage supported the claim that touch therapies minimise analgesic usage. No significant placebo effect was identified. The trials included patients with acute pain, chronic pain, cancer pain, AIDS pain and "spiritual pain" caused by any disease or illness.
Caveat	The major limitation of the review is the small number of studies and insufficient data, although the evidence that does exist supports the use of touch therapies in pain relief. The lack of sufficient data means the results are inconclusive.
Context	Pain is a global public health problem, affecting the lives of large numbers of patients and their families. Healing Touch, Therapeutic Touch and Reiki have been found to relieve pain, but some reviews have suggested there is insufficient evidence to support their use.
Cochrane Systematic Review	So PS et al. Touch therapies for pain relief in adults. Cochrane Reviews 2008, Issue 4. Article No. CD006535. DOI:10.1002/14651858.CD006535.pub2. This review contains 24 studies involving 1153 participants.
PEARLS 142, February 2009, written by Brian R McAvoy (First published in New Zealand Doctor, 8 April 2009)	

[References]

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