

## Why Do Touch-Based Therapies (Reiki, Healing Touch and Therapeutic Touch) Work?

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Touch-based therapies (Reiki, Healing Touch, Therapeutic Touch) are the subject of study and scientific research and thanks to the numerous publications of the last forty years, they have been shown to have a positive effect on a wide variety of disorders. But why do they work?

**Discussion:** The human being is a complex organism and in this brief communication it is divided into four fundamental parts, namely physical body, mind, emotions and soul. A fifth part considered is the self. In this brief communication it is theorized and explained, for the first time, how touch-based therapies act simultaneously on the four fundamental components of the person with different mechanisms of action, specific for each of these parts. These mechanisms of action emerge from the analysis of the main publications concerning touch-based therapies.

**Conclusion:** Touch-based therapies have shown their effectiveness in numerous independent studies to be a useful complementary and complementary medicine therapy to stimulate self-healing mechanisms, prevent disease and improve overall health. The mechanisms of action reported in this brief communication are a theory that emerges from the analysis of what has been published and that wants to explain why touch-based therapies work. However, further studies and research are needed to more clearly define their various mechanisms of action.

**Keywords:** Reiki; Healing Touch (HT); Therapeutic Touch (TT)

### Introduction

Now-a-days there are many studies in the scientific literature, including clinical cases, on the effectiveness of various complementary care techniques based on hand imposition, such as Reiki, therapeutic touch (TT) and healing touch (HT). These techniques, as a whole, have been shown to have a positive effect on a variety of disorders, particularly in the therapy and management of various kind of pain, in anxiety, in stress and in general, on the condition of malaise by facilitating the natural healing processes of the organism [1-9]. But what is the scientific explanation behind the action and effectiveness of these techniques? Well, this is the purpose of this brief communication: offering an answer to this question.

The human being is a complex organism that goes far beyond an organized grouping of cells. In addition to the physical body, genetically determined and therefore already complex on an anatomic and physiological level and therefore different for each individual, the human being possesses an extremely complex mind in its functioning mechanisms, the ability to experience and cultivate emotions and, to finish, but no less important, the inner thrusts of a soul towards transcendence and spirituality. These four components, together, are differently represented in each person, they are subject to dynamic changes over time, and they relate to each other to create the individual self. Physical body, mind, emotions, soul and self, together, form the individual. Here is how, guided by this awareness, the human dimension takes on a broader form, as does the concept of health, which therefore becomes synonymous of that balance and of that state

of homeostasis that differs from the simple state of being free from illness or injury but rather than it leads to the complete state of well-being physical, mental, emotional, spiritual and socio-environmental.

### Discussion

What has just been said lays the foundation for explaining and understanding because complementary and integrative medicine techniques, such as those involving the imposition of hands, are effective and useful tools to accompany current and established medical therapies. It remains to explain why they act and what are their mechanisms of action.

Touch-based therapies act simultaneously on the four components of the person (Figure 1), not equally in the same way and with the same weight but to a different extent depending on the type of disorder and the individual who receives them. Action even on just one or more of the four components, even on all of them, directly influences the self. The self during and/or after the treatment session, will in turn act on the other four components of the individual thus triggering a mechanism of action and correspondence between the various parts such that, in the end, the individual will benefit totally of it, on the whole of its parts, that is to say both on the physical, that mental, emotional and spiritual level.

The mechanisms of action on the physical body have not yet been clarified, however clear biochemical and physiological responses have been highlighted during and subsequently the individual sessions, included the activation of the parasympathetic nervous system [10-12]. These biochemical and physiological changes could be explained precisely by contact with the operator's hands. It is known that the

human body emits radiation in the infrared spectrum in the form of black-body radiation (3-50 μm with a peak output at 9.4 μm) and that this radiation is perceived as heat [13]. Specifically, the frequency range between 4/6 μm and 14 μm is particularly beneficial. This is a portion of the infrared spectrum forming part of the mid-infrared band (MIR), which is called the “growth ray”, “vital ray” or “resonant frequency” because it is efficiently absorbed by living organisms and promoting their growth [14-16].

Through the imposition of the palm of the hands, the recipient's body can benefit from these frequencies produced naturally by the operator, perceivable by the subject treated as heat (which is normally the perceivable part of the ki, chi or mana). These frequencies, in turn, will stimulate the biochemical and physiological processes of the body and will be highlighted with measurable responses.

In addition, since birth, the physical contact, which goes from the embrace to the handshake to the simple physical touch, which is what interests about the therapeutic touch, has positive effects and it is able to act on the emotional state by preparing the human being to tranquillity and individual openness towards others [17,18]. It gives security, relaxes and dampens emotions such as sadness, anger and fear, transforming them into their opposite, that is peace, security,

calm, joy and love. This has a fundamental impact on the emotional aspect present in the diseases and in the psychosomatic disorders.

The mechanism of action on the psychic level of touch-based therapies is mainly due to the placebo effect. They act on the psychosomatic components of the disease inducing numerous neurovegetative modifications that lead to the liberation of a numerous series of chemical mediators, including endorphins and hormones, which have a positive action both on the perception of pain that on the psyche of the subject treated and, in general, on the whole organism [19,20].

Faith and belief, very studied in the field of spiritual healing and therapies based on the action of prayer, together with the placebo effect mentioned above, can explain how touch-based therapies act on a spiritual/soul level and why they are able to increase the perception of well-being, the feeling of comfort and connection with that something greater, of interior, and to produce that individual experience of connection with the sacred, with the deepest part of the human being, which helps to achieve a greater sense of peace, harmony and inner well-being, which contributes to healing and has a positive impact on the general state of health [21].

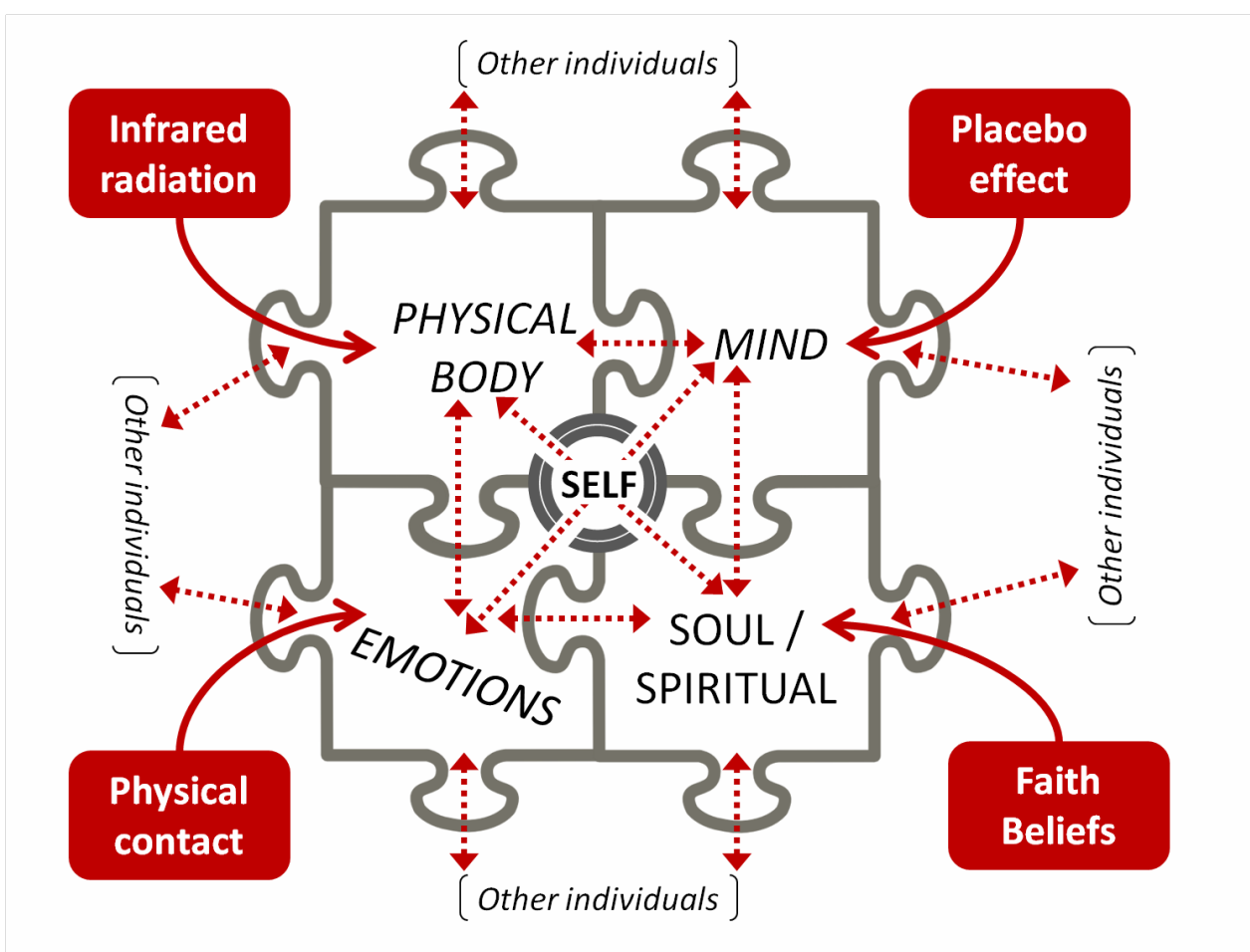


Figure 1: The five parts of the individual, their relationships and the mechanisms of action of touch-based therapies.

In the figure the individual is simplified and broken down into its components, namely the physical body, the psyche (mental level), the emotions (emotional part) and the soul (spiritual level). These parts form the self and, different for each individual and dynamics over time, relate and influence each other directly or indirectly through the self. All parts also relate to other individuals and the environment and respond in various ways to the action of touch-based therapies. The mechanisms of action are different according to the compartment responding to the therapy and the action even on only one part affects all the others.

## Conclusion

Touch-based therapies, such as Reiki, therapeutic touch and healing touch, are certainly a useful complementary salutogenic approach to stimulate self-healing mechanisms, to prevent illness and to improve health status in general. They act globally on the individual and not only on its individual components, which we could roughly divide into the physical body, psyche, emotional state and spiritual dimension. The mechanisms of action of touch-based therapies are multiple and corresponding to the action on these individual components, however further studies, researches, and measurement tools are needed to identify them, define them and understand them more clearly.

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