

# Tapping Into Energy

Enliven your spa menu with therapies intended to balance the human energy field.

By Linda Jacobson-Kossoff

## “Energy.”

It's one of those terms that some therapists and alternative medicine practitioners use to explain how their treatments work, but that also tends to leave a vague-at-best impression on the listener's mind. It's always difficult to crystallize a concept that can't be tangibly seen, held, heard or smelt, but like so many therapies that have been embraced in the modern wellness community, energy work is gaining credibility as more people take the plunge and reap the rewards.

Do you currently offer energy work in your spa services as stand-alone treatments or add-ons? If so, are they as popular as you'd like them to be? Or, are you currently not offering these therapies because you're not sure how to incorporate and market them—mainly because you don't know how, or even if, they really work? It's important to understand that when it comes to energy work, you have a wide variety in both the types of treatments you choose, and to what extent you provide them.

But before we go over the different kinds of energy therapies currently being practiced, we need to clarify the broad term "energy." According to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine ([www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)), energy medicine "... deals with energy fields of two types: veritable, which can be measured, and putative, which have yet to be measured." **Veritable energies** involve the use of measurable wavelengths and frequencies. Therapies in this arena involve

mechanical vibrations (such as sound), magnetism, radiation (such as laser beams) and rays.

Generally in the spa world, when we refer to "energy work," we're talking about **putative energy fields**, the immeasurable energy believed to exist around and throughout each human being. While definitions and interpretations vary, we've heard it expressed in terms that cross cultural divides: "chi (or ki or qi)," "chakras," "prana," "aura" and "life force," to name a few. The commonly used scientific term is "biofield." No matter what you call it, it has been the focus of a wide range of therapeutic modalities designed to clear blockages, resolve disturbances and allow energy to flow smoothly, thus facilitating a balanced mind and body. Acupuncture, now a widely accepted practice even in Western culture, is based on this principle, as is much of herbal medicine.

The putative energy therapies a day spa is most likely to offer to clients are those that require nothing more than a practitioner, a client and a treatment room.

## Reiki

Reiki is a Japanese term most commonly translated as "universal life force energy." The use of the word itself can be confusing, as it serves to describe 1) the name of the therapeutic practice; 2) the energy with which it works; and 3) the energy source. One of the most frequently used forms is the Usui System, founded by Dr. Mikao Usui, an educator who practiced in Kyoto, Japan, in the late 1800s. The system has spread through oral tradition as healers have shared their knowledge and exchanged treatments.

The reiki treatment method is relatively simple: The practitioner places his or her hands on or above (within the energy field) the client's fully clothed body. A series of very specific positions are used to help facilitate the flow of reiki through the practitioner and into the client to clear energy blockages and effect physical, emotional, mental and spiritual balance. The 60- to 90-minute treatment is generally very pleasant and relaxing for clients, who often report warm, tingling and pulsating sensations. Sometimes there's an emotional release, and it's not unusual for clients to shed tears during or after a treatment.

Reiki fits nicely into day spa menus, where the treatments are often listed under "massages" to help





clients get a sense of what to expect. Indeed, reiki and massage can be neatly combined in a service, as a great way to introduce a client to the benefits of energy work.

Spa facilities are perfect for reiki treatments, which require a very serene setting. Soft lighting is a must. Some clients may benefit from soft music and/or aromatherapy, while others might find these distracting. The service can be performed on a table or the floor, with extras such as blankets and bolsters to optimize comfort.

There are organizations that govern the training of reiki practitioners (see “Making a Connection,” page 56). Those who’ve been properly trained obtain official degrees of expertise—I, II, III, IIIA and IIIB, all of which qualify them to perform the treatment. However, those who’ve attained degrees IIIA and IIIB are considered master therapists and teachers, proven to possess a higher ability to access energy.

When seeking a qualified reiki therapist for your spa, ask the following questions:

- How long have you been practicing and what degree have you attained?
- Who was your master teacher? (Then check with the teacher to find out where and how the applicant was trained.)
- Are you experienced with working on clients who aren’t familiar with reiki?
- Do you have references who aren’t relatives or close friends?
- How do you feel about reiki?

Finally, pay attention to the therapist’s manner and attitude. A good reiki practitioner should demonstrate a nurturing and perceptive personal-

ity that will enable him or her to deliver a truly healing experience to your clients.

## Polarity Therapy

Polarity therapy was developed in the late 1940s in Chicago by Dr. Randolph Stone (1890-1981), a chiropractor, osteopath and naturopath whose studies in Indian ayurvedic and Chinese medicine principles led him to seek an integrative method based on the fundamental law concerning the attraction and union of opposites. (In Chinese medicine, this is commonly referred to as *yin* and *yang*; in Indian healing, it’s closer to the seven chakra layers that require cooperation and synchronicity amongst each other to establish ideal health.) Based on the idea that the human body is a vessel containing positive, negative and neutral currents, polarity therapy seeks to establish and maintain a constantly dynamic and cyclic flow.

Stone believed that the human energy field is affected by many external factors, among them:

- Attitude
- Diet
- Environment
- Life experience
- Movement
- Relationships
- Sound
- Touch

The theory behind polarity therapy calls for a comprehensive approach to treatment that usually covers bodywork, nutrition, exercise and counseling. A typical bodywork session takes 60 to 90 minutes and involves both verbal interaction and touch, which might involve rocking motions and

deep pressure, depending on where the therapist detects blockages. The client remains clothed.

Nutritional guidance in polarity therapy is aimed at decongesting and detoxifying the system with a purifying diet consisting of simply prepared soups, salads, produce, herbal teas and cleansing drinks. The prescribed exercise is polarity yoga, which differs from other yoga forms in that it involves stretching and rocking motions as opposed to static poses. Finally, the client is directly and indirectly (through the therapy) encouraged to adopt positive thinking patterns to affect his or her life energy for the better.

“Polarity therapy enables clients to talk and receive their body work at the same time, and that really gets them connected to their bodies,” explains Gina Osher, who opened Spirituality Spa ([www.spiritualityspa.com](http://www.spiritualityspa.com)), a holistic therapy center in Brentwood, California, with business partner Sheryl Bard about three years ago. “Often during therapy they laugh, cry—just let go of baggage.”

## Thought Field Therapy & Emotional Freedom Technique

Developed in the 1980s by cognitive therapist Dr. Roger Callahan, thought field therapy (TFT) is



Thought field therapy is used to help clients “take the charge out of emotional issues.”

based on the idea that there are consistent, determinable energy links between certain psychological issues and specific meridian points in the body. Callahan, who has written extensively on the subject, chose the term because he believes that when

people think about something associated with an emotional issue, they tune into a “thought field” that they then contribute to with “perturbations,” or pieces of information that ultimately contribute to the negative aspects of the issue.

The TFT method involves physical tapping on meridian points, sometimes in a specific sequence, sometimes simultaneously with humming, counting or performing eye movements, while the subject thinks about the issue at hand. Theoretically, the practice works to balance the right and left hemispheres of the brain. The therapy can be self-

administered or performed by anyone who undergoes the simple training.

Victoria Danzig, a La Jolla, California-based, licensed certified social worker who first worked for her county mental health program, then went into private practice in 1985, turned to TFT after realizing that her patients with persistent trauma symptoms hadn’t responded to more conventional methods. “I’ve found that the TFT technique takes away the emotional charge of the thoughts,” Danzig says. “It’s effective for fears, phobias, anxiety, trauma and even addictive urges.”

Emotional freedom technique (EFT) was developed by Gary Craig, one of Callahan’s students, as an offshoot of TFT. The difference between the two lies in the more comprehensive nature of EFT, which calls for tapping on all meridian points to eliminate treatment failure in the case of misdiagnosis.

## Art or Science?

Not surprisingly, a lack of verifiable scientific proof supporting putative energy therapies as legitimate healing practices has led to debate as to whether methods such as reiki, polarity and, more commonly, thought field therapy and therapeutic touch, are anything more than “feel-good services” whose unsubstantiated reports of success should be held suspect. Certainly, an argument can be made for the power of placebo in all health and wellness treatments, but in the absence of science there’s no real way to know whether anything more than a placebo effect is taking place. There’s also no denying that this creates an unfortunate opportunity for practitioners with monetary motives to prey on a public that’s increasingly seeking ways to counteract its increasing cultural stress.

However, we should also remember that many therapies that now enjoy mainstream acceptance—acupuncture, massage, hypnotherapy, homeopathy and herbology, to name just a few—were also once regarded with suspicion, and even disdain. Experts in the field of energy therapy have made some strides: Kirlian photography, aura imaging and gas discharge visualization documenting dramatic before-and-after results point to the probability that these therapies do indeed have an effect on the human body. And according to the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine ([www.nccam.nih.gov](http://www.nccam.nih.gov)), several studies gauging electrocardiography and electroencephalogram readings seem to indicate that individual energy fields can overlap when individuals touch, or even sit opposite one another.

## Therapeutic Touch

Therapeutic touch (TT), sometimes called healing touch, was developed in the early 1970s by registered nurse and professor Dolores Krieger, who together with co-founder Dora Kunz embraced the idea that the body is ruled by a vital energy force channeled by nonphysical energy centers. Therapists using this technique “feel” energy imbalances and seek to correct them by using a specific three-step sequence:

1. Centering, a meditative process wherein the therapist focuses on his or her intention to heal.
2. Assessment, wherein the therapist sweeps his or her hands over the body at a 2- to 4-inch distance to detect the location(s) of imbalances.
3. Unruffling, the therapist’s use of specific motions to redistribute, rebalance and/or rid the body of energy.

TT is possibly one of the most controversial energy therapies, with some claiming that the practice is no more than a brand of faith healing. Yet, its roots in the nursing profession have given it legs to grow into a widely available treatment.



## Spiritual Practices

Should spirituality play a role in the world of healing? Many individuals believe that it’s impossible to separate the spirit from the human mind and body—that in fact it’s detrimental to do so—and therefore all three must be treated. Others strongly believe that the role of healing professionals is to focus on the mind and body only, leaving the client to deal with spiritual matters privately.

Meanwhile the scientific community is agreeing to consider all possibilities. In 2000 The Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine of the NIH gave a grant to The University of Arizona’s Department of Integrative Medicine to study the effects of an energy-based healing practice called *johrei*. The treatment,

which has its roots in Japan, involves the channeling of a “divine energy” from the therapist for the purpose of uplifting, healing and attuning the client to a type of “spiritual truth.” Though the study’s results ultimately yielded nothing conclusive, the popularity of the spirituality-based therapy is on the rise.

**Vortex healing** is said to harness the energy of a particular vortex that’s able to tap into a divine, healing consciousness created thousands of years ago by an avatar, or incarnated deity. This overtly spiritual practice draws clients who are especially concerned with the “karmic” elements of their energy imbalances.

## Energy in Action

“Maybe I’m an energy therapist because I grew up with hippie parents,” reflects Spirituality Spa’s Osher. “The

## Making a Connection

Finding the right energy therapy practitioner for your day spa requires the same careful consideration you’d give to hiring an esthetician or massage therapist. There are certifying bodies to ensure that training has taken place (see below), references to gather and, of course, professional recommendations to consider. However, in the end it’s the personality, talent and commitment of the individual that’s most important.

“Energy practitioners are naturally very sensitive people—some of them feel energy changes in others, some say they actually see auras around people,” says Gina Osher, energy therapist and co-owner of Spirituality Spa in Brentwood, California, who reminds that experience is key. “It’s important to remember that some of these people are just learning how to channel their talents,” she says. Osher and her staff receive actual energy sessions from candidates before making a decision.

To help you connect with professional energy therapists, check out the following sources:

American Polarity Therapy Association, [www.polaritytherapy.org](http://www.polaritytherapy.org), 336/574-1121

Association for Comprehensive Energy Psychology, [www.energypsych.org](http://www.energypsych.org), 619/861-2237

Association for Thought Field Therapy, [www.tftrx.com](http://www.tftrx.com), 760/564-1008

The International Center for Reiki Training, [www.reiki.org](http://www.reiki.org), 248/948-8112

The Radiance Technique International Association, [www.trtia.org](http://www.trtia.org), 727/347-2106

The Reiki Alliance, [www.usuireiki.com](http://www.usuireiki.com), 208/783-3535

idea that there's an energy in our bodies and around us was never an obscure concept; it has been around in my life as long as I can remember." Osher's earnest journey into energy work started 10 years ago when a painful divorce and health problems brought her to California to seek the help of healers. "As I worked with them I realized how amazing energy therapy is," she explains.

Osher is a Usui reiki master, polarity therapy practitioner and reflexologist; co-owner Bard is a certified hypnotherapist. The two have also taken on a therapeutic touch specialist and a homeopath. "Our setup enables us to customize combination therapies for our clients," Osher explains. "We have people coming in with extreme stress, abuse issues, the need to quit smoking—the list goes on. Even when the problems are the same, the way they manifest varies, so we deal with what people need in the moment. Often I'll use a combination of reiki and polarity to get a sense of what's going

on." Osher also uses an extensive intake form to assess new clients.

Danzig believes that energy work such as thought field therapy is a natural fit for spas. "Anybody can do TFT," she says. "You don't need to be licensed. It's like following a recipe." She notes that because the typical TFT treatment is eight minutes long, it's a perfect add-on for a massage therapist treatment for a client with physical or emotional trauma. "For some problems one treatment is all that's needed, but more complex issues might require several sessions."

Because energy work is such an elusive concept to sell, spas and wellness centers tend to rely on word-of-mouth marketing. People for whom the treatment works are often astonished and tend to share their experiences with friends and relatives, who become curious to see if the therapy will work for them. ●

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