

Reiki and Rats

Charman, R. (2009). A Review of Baldwin A.L., Wagers C., and Schwartz G.E. (2008). Reiki Improves Heart Rate Homeostasis in Laboratory Rats. *The Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*. Vol 14(3): 417-422.

A couple of studies have shown that a 30 minute session of Reiki (which I interpret here as any equivalent form of healing technique) reduced the heart rate (HR) and blood pressure (BP) in resting volunteer healthy subjects. In another trial investigating the effect of Reiki on the autonomic nervous system (comprised of the sympathetic system that raises HR and BP during stress, and the parasympathetic system that reduces through calming control in mutual balance) it was found that Reiki reduced both HR and BP at rest. The problem, is the confounding factor of the placebo effect as an explanation when you know you are receiving any form of treatment, and this is where the rats came in.

Under anaesthetic three rats had a tiny radio transmitter placed inside their abdomen with sensors for BP and HR. An earlier experiment had shown that when rats are exposed to the loud sound of what is called 'white noise' for 15 minutes their BPs and HRs are significantly raised during the period of aural stress and then drops back to normal. The question was this: If Reiki was given to these three rats sometimes before the noise was switched on, or after the noise was switched on, or sometimes all through the experimental period, would it decrease their BPs and HRs as compared to them receiving sham Reiki in a similar, 8 day, follow up trial? The procedure was that for the first three days in each trial the rats would receive white noise with their HRs and BPs recorded as baseline, and for the next five days they would receive Reiki or, in the follow up trial, sham Reiki. For daily company each telemetered rat was pair housed with a non implanted rat who was just there as a friend. They were free to skip about and chat (God! That's a terrible noise!), and had fresh food and water throughout. During the trial both the Reiki healers, and sham Reiki practitioners who knew nothing about healing, placed their hands about 4ft from the front of the cage (I presume they wore ear muffs in self defence).

Results

Very interesting; sham Reiki had no effect on either BP or HR. When Reiki was given during the pre sound quiet period it consistently reduced their normal activity HR, but not their normal BP, and their HR rose only slightly throughout the noise stress period. If Reiki was applied after the noise had commenced the resultant stress increase in HR was reduced but not quite back to pre noise levels. If applied in the pre noise stage and continued through the noise stage their HR remained steady at just below normal activity throughout. The rise in BP in all cases remained unaffected. The investigators concluded that 'Reiki reduces HR in stressed and unstressed animals and promotes homeostasis, thereby optimizing cardiac function'. They go on to say that resting HR is an important indicator of how hard the heart is working to maintain blood flow, and a high resting HR is strongly correlated with an increased death rate in middle aged men (sorry ladies, you are not mentioned here).

Implications

While I am not happy with animal experiments, once done, to ignore the results seems pointless. My reason for bringing this trial to your attention is that, once again, healing intention has been shown to have a direct effect on the physiological system of another animal even though we do not know how. Over the last 60 years there has been over 20, good quality, non placebo effect trials demonstrating the positive effects of healing intention on enzyme reaction rates, inhibition of fungi growth, bacterial multiplication, bone cell multiplication, rate of wound healing, stressed seed germination, rate of seedling growth and, as here, reducing stress reactions. Many other less procedurally good but honest trials have found a similar pattern. What should the healing movement do with these findings?

In everyday practice my impression is that healers tend to treat chronic to terminal conditions mainly, it seems, because of the emotional relief that healing can bring to people in these unhappy circumstances, especially in terms of restoring body, mind, and spiritual harmony. Some hospices now include healers and, as we know, Angie has persuaded staff and patients at UCH that healing has a valuable place in leukaemia. In summary, healing tends to be equated with chronic care and I think healers may tend to agree with this. But if these non placebo studies are telling us a true story, surely healers should be involved in accelerating the healing rates of acute injury and resolution of infection as well, from A&E, to trauma and surgical wards into ICU. In fact, in ICU healers would be giving non placebo healing to unconscious patients and the effects would be demonstrated by objective physiological monitoring. There have been many anecdotal reports of sportsmen receiving healing for injuries with a rapid return to the pitch. Again anecdotally, animal healers have great success with acute injuries, often when the vet has written the situation off. You have only to read Margrit Coates' *Healing for Horses* and *Healing for Pets*. I have seen Margrit healing a horse and was fascinated by the way it just calmed down and accepted the healing. When you think about it, in everyday life the healee has the combined advantage of healing plus placebo effect!

Written by Bob Charman

Reference

Baldwin A.L., Wagers C., Schwartz G.E. (2008). Reiki Improves Heart Rate Homeostasis in Laboratory Rats. *JACM*. Vol 14(3): 417-422.