Tap Your Troubles Away (Part 1)

The Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) has become a popular, mind-body healing modality that’s slowly transitioning into mainstream acceptance. It is a form of acupressure-assisted exposure therapy, where you tap on various acupressure points while focusing on troublesome emotional issues.

Basically, the technique catalyzes the release of negatively charged, stuck emotions that compromise—like an albatross around our necks—the fullness of our potential. Through EFT, we let go energetically of the emotional baggage that keeps us from moving on. The memory is still there, but the charge is gone.

EFT has successfully treated issues that have yielded—reluctantly, at best—to years of psychotherapy or medication. Furthermore, because virtually all chronic disorders have mind-body correlates, EFT has the potential to lessen physical symptoms and pain, and pave the path to healing. It is a self-healing and -empowerment technique people can learn to do by and for themselves. It has no negative side effects.

The problem for many, however, is the technique seems too simple to generate the stunning results often observed when more involved, time-consuming, costly approaches have fallen way short. We don’t believe it can be that easy; we want a therapy that conforms to our expectations and biomedical understandings.

Energy Medicine

EFT falls under the umbrella of energy medicine (specifically energy psychology), a very different way of looking at healing and wellness than conventional medicine. In fact, energy medicine—which includes, for example, acupuncture/acupressure, therapeutic touch, homeopathy, light and sound therapy—is the fastest-growing subfield in medicine today.

Conventional medicine’s reductionistic viewpoint essentially believes we are “meat” machines with component body parts, whether they are tiny molecules like neurotransmitters, cells such as neurons, or anatomical structures like our spinal cords. If the body breaks down, we need to fix or replace constituent parts, e.g., transplanting stem cells into an injured cord.

In contrast, reflecting healing philosophies that prevailed throughout the ages until modern times, energy medicine believes our biochemistry is affected by and interactive with our subtle energy fields. If you attempt to fix dysfunctional physiology without addressing this superceding influence, healing will be inherently limited. It is like trying to push a car in one direction when the steering wheel is cranked another way. A good conceptual example is that restored function after stem-cell transplantation (i.e., replacing a part) has been shown to be greater when it is combined with acupuncture (i.e., energetically pointing the stem cells in the right direction).

EFT is based on two key energy-medicine tenets. First, we have an acupunctural system of points and meridians that regulate the flow of life-force energy throughout our bodies. As an analogy, view the meridians as a pipeline through which the energy flows; the acupuncture points as periodically placed, flow-controlling valves; and the acupuncture needles as the socket wrench that opens the valves. [With EFT, instead of needles, the pressure of tapping fingers regulates the flow.]

Sample EFT Applications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic performance</th>
<th>Guilt</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addictions</td>
<td>Grief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety</td>
<td>Health</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflicts</td>
<td>Insomnia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cravings</td>
<td>Obsessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Depression</td>
<td>Pain management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fears &amp; phobias</td>
<td>Personal development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Posttraumatic stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Procrastination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Speaking &amp; stage fright</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sports performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Travel fears</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Weight loss</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Overall, each of us has a unique energy flow that is optimal for our health, and when this flow gets off-kilter for any mind-body-spirit reason, we become compromised.

Secondly, emotions are a function of our internal energy flows. When our energy flows are weak or blocked, we may feel tired, cranky, irritable, or easily triggered. When our energy flows are strong and open, we feel fresher and more present, alive, loving, and joyful. By crimping energy flow and distribution, negative emotions become psychosomatic baggage.

Although we may not appreciate the influence of these often pushed-down emotions in everyday life, they are there, gnawing away at our ability to function optimally. EFT releases the energy behind these emotions. The heavy emotional suitcase we have been dragging through the long concourse of life becomes a light carry-on of non-charged memories.

Overall, EFT-generated benefits include:
- Desensitizing negative emotions and associated physical reactions
- Releasing mood-altering neurotransmitters and hormones
- Triggering the relaxation response
- Interrupting stuck or limiting behavioral patterns/mindsets
- Resetting the body’s internal electrical system
- Initiating energetic, perceptual, cognitive, and physical shifts
- Inducing feelings of joy, satisfaction, relaxation, peacefulness, and well-being

**EFT Applications**

EFT can blunt the impact of many of life’s “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” that chip away at our spirit, ranging from the minor to the all-consuming. If you are uptight due to traffic, being chewed out by your boss, or argu-

---

**Basic EFT Procedures**

**Preliminary**

1. Start by picking the issue, attempting to be as specific as possible. For general, amorphous issues, dissect them into component parts and work on each separately.

2. Assess issue intensity on a scale of 0–10 (most intense).

3. Create a reminder phrase to repeat while tapping. For example, if you fear giving talks, your reminder phrase might be “public speaking.”

4. Locate the EFT “tender spot” by going to the base of the neck where a tie is knotted, then go down three inches and over three inches. This area is sometimes tender when rubbed because of lymphatic congestion.

5. While rubbing the tender spot, state the following affirmation three times: “Even though I have this fear of public speaking [or war memory, fear of flying, alcohol craving, etc.], I deeply and completely accept myself.”

**Tapping Sequence**

Using several fingertips, tap 7-10 times at each of the indicated locations (see illustration) while repeating your reminder phase. The tapping points proceed down the body, making them easier to memorize.

**Face and Body**
- Beginning of eyebrow on each side of nose
- Side of eyes
- Under each eye
- Under the nose
- Middle of chin
- Beginning of collarbone where the sternum and first rib meet
- Four inches under each arm
- One inch below each nipple

**Hands & Fingers**

Tap the
- Outside cuticle edge of your thumb at the base of the thumbnail
- Thumb-facing edge of each finger (except ring finger) at fingernail base
- The fleshy outside edge of the palm used to deliver a karate chop (To save time, tapping can be consolidated, e.g., the outside edge of your right thumb can be used to tap on the outside edge of your left thumb, etc.)

A longer EFT version includes tapping on the hand’s gamut point (see illustration) while carrying out various eye movements, counting, and humming tunes. Although these sound strange, different parts of the brain are stimulated with each of these actions.

Finally, reassess the intensity of the issue and repeat the cycle.
Who cares about family caregivers? We do!

NATIONAL FAMILY CAREGIVERS ASSOCIATION (NFCA) is the nation's leading grass-roots organization in support of America's family caregivers. NFCA educates, supports, empowers, and speaks up for the more than 50 million people who care for disabled or chronically ill loved ones. NFCA reaches across the life span and all diagnoses to focus on the issues common to all who find themselves in a caregiving role. Join with us for personal support, for access to resources, and to give family caregivers a national voice.

☐ Yes! I want to join NFCA.

Here is my tax deductible contribution:
☐ $10/N/C, Individual caregiver
☐ $20, Family friend
☐ $40, Individual professional

NAME

ADDRESS

ADDRESS

CITY/STATE/ZIP

TELEPHONE

SEND TO:
NFCA, 14000 CONNECTICUT AVE., STE. 500, KENSINGTON, MARYLAND 20895-5944, OR WWW.ITHEFAMILYCAREGIVER.ORG

Ining with your spouse, EFT can put you back on an even keel.

So to speak, EFT is the lint brush that wipes away the unneeded clumps of emotional lint that cling to us and cumulatively drag us down over time.

At the other end of the spectrum, the suffering, anguish, or anxiety associated with major issues like addiction, intense phobias, childhood abuse, trauma, or posttraumatic stress often let up in response to EFT. On occasion, deep-seated, life-compromising issues have been quickly resolved. The emotional balloon swollen with negative charge is punctured and deflated.

However, numerous issues require persistent practice to dissipate the energies due to the many problem aspects that need to be peeled away layer by layer.

Under negative behaviors—such as irrational anger, acting out, addictions, and psychosomatic conditions—often lies trauma. In addition, studies have shown a direct correlation between adverse childhood experiences and later adult illnesses.

I've incorporated EFT tapping into everyday life. If I wake up at 3:00 a.m., fretting about life's concerns, I tap and go back to sleep. If I'm irritated from a perceived slight, I tap it away, keeping it from festering under the surface.

I recently gave a lecture on alternative medicine to mainstream health professionals, who often are not receptive to the topic. Given my concern about the audience and public speaking in general, I taped before my lecture. It released my speaking angst, and, as a result, "the force was with me."

Various EFT applications are listed in "Sample EFT Applications." Try it on any issue.

EFT Procedures

Given their often profound results, the basic EFT procedures are amazingly simple and can readily be picked up after a few short demonstrations. However, because it is more difficult to show their simplicity through a brief, introductory article, I encourage interested readers to check out the resources list. Although procedures are easy, it is helpful to be guided initially by an experienced EFT practitioner when it comes to major issues.

As summarized in "Basic EFT Procedures," you tap on key acupuncture points while focusing on a specific issue. These points are specifically selected because they are located at the end of various acupuncture meridians. If you have limited finger mobility, use your hands or just visualize the tapping.

Part 2 will focus on EFT and posttraumatic-stress disorder (PTSD), a problem experienced by many veterans returning home from combat.

Contact: laurancejohnston@msn.com. The author wishes to extend special thanks to his EFT teachers, especially John Freedom.

Resources

(1) www.eftuniverse.com
This comprehensive EFT website lists many resources (including a free "get-started package"), training opportunities, and practitioners.

Tap Your Troubles Away (Part 2)

The Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT) is an extraordinarily easy-to-use, energy-psychology technique for promoting mind-body healing. After introducing the technique in Part 1 (December 2010), we will now discuss its potential for treating posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), a condition plaguing many returning combat veterans—as well as anyone who has had a traumatic incident.

Review

As summarized in my previous column, EFT is a form of acupuncture-assisted exposure therapy. The EFT procedure consists of tapping on key acupressure (i.e., acupuncture) points while focusing on specific emotional issues. Interestingly, some of these points are locations we instinctively rub when under stress. If you have limited finger mobility, you can use your hands or visualize the tapping.

Although often just used to energetically deflate life's ongoing irritants that slow us down, EFT can be effective in treating major mental or physical trauma such as child abuse, spinal-cord injury (SCI), or combat-related events. These traumatizing incidents can be emotional minefields buried in our consciousness, waiting for the right triggers to explode and sabotage life. Basically, EFT is a behavioral desensitization technique that defuses the emotional charge on memories so they are no longer experienced as painful or traumatic.

Although skeptics have criticized EFT as not being an "evidenced-based therapy," preliminary studies suggest it works much faster and with greater efficacy than conventional approaches. The basic EFT-tapping procedures are simple and can be easily learned by reading or watching various, readily available resources.

Basic EFT Procedures

Preliminary

(1) Start by picking the issue, attempting to be as specific as possible. For general, amorphous issues, dissect them into component parts and work on each separately.

(2) Assess issue intensity on a scale of 0–10 (most intense).

(3) Create a reminder phrase to repeat while tapping. For example, if you fear giving talks, your reminder phrase might be "public speaking."

(4) Locate the EFT "tender spot" by going to the base of the neck where a tie is knotted, then go down three inches and over three inches. This area is sometimes tender when rubbed because of lymphatic congestion.

(5) While rubbing the tender spot, state the following affirmation three times: "Even though I have this fear of public speaking [or war memory, fear of flying, alcohol craving, etc.], I deeply and completely accept myself."

Tapping Sequence

Using several fingertips, tap 7–10 times at each of the indicated locations (see illustration) while repeating your reminder phrase. The tapping points proceed down the body, making them easier to memorize.

Face and Body

- Beginning of eyebrow on each side of nose
- Side of eyes
- Under each eye
- Under the nose
- Middle of chin
- Beginning of collarbone where the sternum and first rib meet
- Four inches under each arm
- One inch below each nipple

Hands & Fingers

Tap the

- Outside cuticle edge of your thumb at the base of the thumbnail
- Thumb-facing edge of each finger (except ring finger) at fingernail base
- The fleshy outside edge of the palm used to deliver a karate chop
  (To save time, tapping can be consolidated; e.g., the outside edge of your right thumb can be used to tap on the outside edge of your left thumb, etc.)

A longer EFT version includes tapping on the hand's gamut point (see illustration) while carrying out various eye movements, counting, and humming tunes. Although these sound strange, different parts of the brain are stimulated with each of these actions.

Finally, reassess the intensity of the issue and repeat the cycle.
For major issues like PTSD, it is helpful to be guided initially by an experienced EFT practitioner because complex issues need to be gently peeled away. However, even in the most serious PTSD cases, many people have benefited from self-learned EFT practice. A good starting point is the book *EFT for PTSD*, by EFT developer Gary Craig.

**PTSD**

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that arises after living through a shocking event in which serious physical harm or its threat occurred in susceptible individuals. The incident causes a fight-or-flight, hyperarousal state that can turn into full-blown PTSD. PTSD is one of the “invisible wounds” of combat, and afflicted individuals often:

1. **Relive the traumatizing** event through nightmares and flashbacks, and have strong physical reactions when reminded of it.
2. **Avoid reminding activities**, thoughts, feelings, and conversations.
3. **Are unable to remember** event details and feel emotionally numb and detached from the present moment.
4. **Lose interest in important** activities, feel alone with nothing to look forward to, and can’t experience normal emotions.
5. **Can’t relax or concentrate**; have trouble sleeping; are irritable, on guard, or angry.
6. **Are more prone to breakups**, divorce, and relationship issues.
7. **Often use drugs and alcohol** to self-medicate the pain and anxiety.

PTSD has been traditionally treated using psychotherapy and antidepressant medications with questionable effectiveness. Although we tend to associate PTSD with more serious traumatization such as combat, it represents an affliction spectrum encompassing anyone whose thoughts and behaviors have been
A Personal Reflection

“I’m a Vietnam veteran, and I suffer from posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD). At the VA I was also diagnosed as bipolar or manic depressive. I have nightmares, I spent since 1997 in hospitals and institutions, I take meds for bipolar, and it’s hard to get any alternative treatment at the VA. My world wasn’t that great; everything in my life was a major challenge. When I came to the EFT event, I had no clue what I was walking into…”

“One of my bad Vietnam War memories involved an enemy attack where I had to pull bodies out of the rubble. I talked about it at the EFT event, and the intensity was so bad I had to leave the room because I felt I was going to puke. Now that EFT has been done on it, I can think about the same incident with little or no intensity. It is no longer part of my dreams. That’s a kind of freedom I never thought I would have. Other war memories have faded as well…”

“I’ve been doing EFT ever since. The changes in my life are 100% totally different. Once you start EFT it’s a totally different way you handle things. Everything like sleep and nightmares and even suicide thoughts all come into a place where a total turnaround happens. I can’t explain it…”

Source: Church, D. Traumatology, 16(1), 2010.

affected by a life-threatening, traumatizing situation.

Clearly, SCI, regardless of cause, falls within this spectrum. Within the SCI community, we have heard the what-if stories concerning injuries. For example, a friend has damned himself for years because he ordered decaf coffee before falling asleep driving home. Another friend has knocked himself for 30 years for scrambling up a wobbly ladder to fix defective roof flashing before a fast-approaching storm. This is baggage no one needs to carry around forever. In other words, EFT’s healing possibilities aren’t just limited to, for example, the soldier surviving an IED roadside bomb explosion but also can be used to deal with the seemingly mundane actions or decisions whose life-changing consequences haunt us.

Combat’s Toll

Studies are demonstrating that combat exacts a huge toll on our returning veterans:

- All veterans in war zones are at risk for PTSD (Institute of Medicine).
- 300,000 troops may require treatment for PTSD.
- 27% of noncommissioned officers serving three or more tours of duty may have PTSD.
- After deployment, 49%, 38%, and 31% of National Guard, Army, and Marine troops, respectively, report psychological symptoms.
- PTSD is associated with addictions, depression, anxiety, or other mental-health issues. Overall, 83% of people with PTSD have additional psychological disorders.
- Antidepressant medications are prescribed for 12% of soldiers stationed in Iraq and 17% in Afghanistan.
- PTSD and depression in returning veterans will cost the nation $6.2 billion in the two years after deployment.
- Approximately 120 veterans commit suicide every week.

Such statistics underscore the problem’s severity and, in turn, the need for new solutions, one of which may be EFT. Clearly, given the technique’s simplicity, there is nothing to lose—except allegiance to failed treatment paradigms—and perhaps much to gain.

PTSD Is Real

Because some people have suggested that PTSD symptoms are merely the consequence of veterans’ mal-adjusted personality, scientists have examined the issue in identical twins by comparing symptoms in a twin who had Vietnam-combat exposure with the twin who did not. If the skeptics were correct, the nontraumatized twin would have similar symptoms due to having the same genetic makeup and upbringing. This was not the case. Investigators concluded “the majority of symptoms reported by combat veterans with PTSD would not have been present were it not for their exposure to traumatic events.”
Dr. Dawson Church (Santa Rosa, Calif.) recently published the results of a pilot study using EFT to treat veterans who have PTSD. The subjects' ages ranged from 26 to 61; seven were male and four, female. Although nine had served in Vietnam or the Iraq wars, two were family members with "transferred military PTSD." Several had physical disabilities.

PTSD was measured with assessment scales and questionnaires adopted by the military. The scales evaluated a variety of PTSD symptoms, including anxiety, depression, obsessive or psychotic behaviors, phobias, hostility, paranoia, insomnia, etc. Evaluations were carried out one month before the study, at the beginning and end of treatment, and periodically thereafter.

Subjects received several 60-minute EFT sessions daily for five days. At the end of the intervention, they were given an instructional DVD so they could continue the practice at home. Before treatment, the average PTSD score was 62 on a scale ranging from 85 (most severe) to 17, meaning the subjects had a high baseline level of PTSD. After the sessions, the average PTSD score decreased to 23, a huge reduction. After 30 days, 90 days, and one year, the scores were still only 32, 33, and 33, respectively. The data implied that EFT is an effective tool for persistent, long-term PTSD alleviation.

Other studies indicate EFT exerts specific physiological effects. For example, it reduces cortisol, a hormonal marker of stress. It also induces a shift in brain waves. Specifically, before EFT, abnormal brain waves were observed when thinking about the traumatizing event; after treatment, a more neutral pattern emerged.

Conclusion

Clearly, combat veterans have much to offer society through the insights and greater awareness they have gained from their challenging experiences. I am honored to have worked with so many of them over the years.

Perhaps EFT is one tool that will help transform their traumatizing experiences into needed understandings that, as Buddhist scholar Thich Nhat Hanh states, can illuminate the way for the whole nation.

"Veterans are the light at the tip of the candle, illuminating the way for the whole nation. If veterans can achieve awareness, transformation, understanding, and peace, they can share with the rest of society the realities of war. And they can teach us how to make peace with ourselves and each other, so we never have to use violence to resolve conflicts again."

The author extends special thanks to John Freedom for insights and comments.

Contact: LauranceJohnston@msn.com