

The tapping technique



Research at Harvard Medical School reveals a revolutionary approach to conquering stress, depression and more

What if there were an easy-to-learn superfast trick that made you immune to the effects of stress? Proponents of Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), or tapping, say this form of therapy is just that. Developed in the 1990s by Stanford University engineer Gary Craig, EFT involves recalling an unpleasant memory while simultaneously pressing a series of acupressure points. Roger J. Callahan, Ph.D., a pioneer in the field, explains, "Tapping produces changes in the body's thought and energy fields, which in turn create changes at the physiological level, leading to reduced stress, anxiety or fear."

Neuroscientists have demonstrated that every memory is encoded in the brain with an emotional charge, says clinical psychologist David Feinstein, Ph.D., coauthor of *Energy Medicine for Women* (Tarcher, 2008). This charge creates a neural pathway to signal an appropriate physiological

TWO STEPS TO LESS STRESS

Tapping can eliminate anxiety in just minutes, and it can be done anywhere, anytime, assures clinical psychologist David Feinstein, Ph.D. Simply find a quiet, private place where you can focus, then follow this easy formula:

STEP 1 Reverse self-defeating thoughts

"Most people have some underlying objection to overcoming their troubling emotion," explains Feinstein. For instance, if they get over the anxiety that drives their procrastination, they might be asked to take on more work at the office. These subconscious thoughts trigger what

therapists refer to as psychological reversal—a polarity of desires in the energy system that can hinder the effectiveness of this healing method. The solution? A simple affirmation. Just fill in the blank below with your anxiety trigger (like "fear of public speaking" or "anger at my sister"): *Even though I have this ____, I deeply and completely accept myself.* Repeat this three times while

tapping the fleshy part of the top of your hand, between your wrist and the base of your pinkie. This exercise will help counter the self-judgment or fear that comes with your subconscious opposition, letting the technique deliver optimal results.

STEP 2 Tap 7 times in each spot

Continue to focus on the memory, thought or experience that's triggering your anxiety or other negative emotion, then tap each of the acupressure points depicted on the

that turns off anxiety

response when you're reminded of the experience or encounter a similar one. Feinstein explains, "These neural pathways were once protective—a swift fight-or-flight reaction to an encounter with a lion could keep you alive. The trouble is, the brain can't differentiate between a lion and a modern stressor like a computer crash, so innocuous situations end up being encoded in the brain as dangerous."

Tapping can help rewire these neural pathways. "Whenever you think about a stressful experience, the brain activates an alarm response in the amygdala, the part of the limbic system that governs emotions," says clinical psychologist Fred P. Gallo, Ph.D., coauthor of *Energy Tapping* (New Harbinger, 2008). "Stimulating acupressure points reduces arousal in the amygdala. These opposing signals quickly communicate to the brain that there is no danger and reprogram the circuitry so the trigger no longer evokes anxiety, fear or other negative emotions."

According to researchers at Harvard Medical School, stimulating these acupressure points reduces blood flow to the amygdala, leading to the release of endorphins, an increase in soothing

GABA waves and reduced cortisol levels. The result: an immediate reduction in anxiety symptoms. "It may take a few sessions to fully erase a trigger," acknowledges Feinstein, who uses tapping in his practice. "But within a few days people begin to notice that their responses to stressors are calmer and that things don't get to them as easily."

More than simple tension relief

Tapping has proven to be so effective that it's now being used to treat several conditions, from depression to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Case in point: In a Swedish study, fibromyalgia patients who were taught to use EFT reported a 29 percent improvement in depression symptoms and a 22 percent drop in pain after eight weeks. And researchers in the Philippines found that people with severe depression saw a 72 percent reduction in symptoms after just four sessions. Another study of 50 adolescents with PTSD revealed that the practice dramatically reduced nightmares, flashbacks and concentration problems, plus continued to curb symptoms one year later. ●

Beth Bryant, 45, Seattle



It worked for me

"I beat chronic stress!"

When Beth Bryant, a professor of law and mother of two, is tense, she tends to proceed to the worst-case scenario. "A bad day at work might mean that I lose my job, and then I won't be able to get a good reference, and then I might not be able to find a new job..." she confesses.

But two years ago, while researching stress relief online, Beth stumbled across a technique that enables her to shut down that worry cycle before it even really gets going. "I'm the original skeptic," she admits. "But tapping didn't seem that weird because I spent three years in Japan, where it's common for people to consult acupuncturists."

After ordering instructional DVDs, Beth quickly learned how to pause and identify a stressor, then tap through and neutralize her reaction to it. She raves, "By pairing an affirmation with tapping, I found I could go from overwhelmed to calm in minutes!"

photo at right seven times, starting from the top and working your way down. Studies at Harvard Medical School show that stimulating these points sends calming signals to the brain's amygdala, dramatically dialing down symptoms of anxiety.

Don't worry too much about following the exact sequence or doing the precise number of taps. "Even if you tap out of order or skip a spot, you'll still experience the beneficial effects," says Feinstein. "It's the combination of tapping and psychological exposure that deactivates the anxiety response."

