

Why is EFT So Effective?

by Peter Graham, EFT Master

Tapping on specific acupressure points while tuning into a feeling or emotional issue is the heart and soul of the Emotional Freedom Techniques. However, there are also a number of other factors that play an important role in its effectiveness and how EFT is applied.

EFT can be viewed as the *acupoint tapping* combined with some other *contributing factors*, where the tapping is the golden centre-piece of the technique. The tapping plus these other factors combine to form a powerful synergy.

It is noteworthy that several of these contributing elements can also function as *standalone techniques* in their own right. However, some of the contributing factors mentioned below overlap or only co-exist with one or more other such factors.

Over the years, many different ideas about why EFT works have emerged and been discussed. Some people think it doesn't matter why it works, it just works. My view is that understanding more about why EFT works can influence the way we apply EFT and enhance the results that can be achieved even further.

The tapping

When applying EFT, tapping is an external stimulus whether it is done by another person or self-applied. Even imagining tapping acts as or mentally simulates an external stimulus.

The body responds to certain external stimuli. There are many therapeutic and spiritual practices that include the use of external stimuli for healing purposes, such as the human touch, stimulating acupuncture points, the use of voice, certain sounds (such as drumming) and sunlight. Hands-on healing has a long history and stimulating acupuncture points goes back a very long way.

The original theory of EFT is that a recurring or persisting negative emotion or feeling is caused by *a disruption in the body's energy system* and that when certain specific acupressure points are tapped on (while remaining *tuned into* that *emotional vibration*) the disruption in the body's energy system is cleared. This disruption would have originally been established by one or a series of earlier painful experiences and the same feeling or emotion is subconsciously re-generated each time it gets triggered, although its intensity may vary.

This energy system theory can be experienced to some degree. If you be the observer and closely observe the bodily feeling(s), sensation(s) and/or emotional vibration(s) that exist in your body before you start tapping and then watch them continuously as you go through each of the tapping points, and also immediately afterwards, you will notice that the felt negative energy will often suddenly shift or reduce in intensity or change into a positive vibration or it may simply

vanish when certain specific acupoints are tapped on. This phenomena occurs frequently and consistently when doing EFT.

There is certainly something going on *energetically* when we tap on acupoints while focusing on a feeling or emotion.

Tuning in

Tuning into a feeling or issue while tapping is an integral part of EFT and success in applying EFT largely depends on it. It is a critical factor in why EFT works because the tapping addresses what the client's attention is currently on. In this context, attention can be defined as selective or directed awareness.

When doing EFT, the emotional issue or feeling being tapped on is consciously *acknowledged* by the client and then given *attention* (continuously or repeatedly) while tapping through the acupoints, which equate to being *tuned into* that feeling or issue.

The use of a "reminder phrase" while tapping (or closely related variations of it) helps the client to stay tuned in to the feeling or emotion or to re-connect with it when his/her attention is grabbed by something else or if it initially disperses or compulsively recoils away from the emotional pain.

Focusing of attention is an effective process in it's own right. This is well covered in the "The Flame of Attention" by J Krishnamurti as well as in "The Journey" by Brandon Bays, Eckhart Tolle's book "The Power of Now" and "The Untethered Soul" by Michael Singer. In Buddhism, it can be viewed as an application of mindfulness.

EFT encourages, supports and utilizes this natural healing process. When we tap through acupoints and tune into a negative feeling or emotion, we are facilitating the process of bringing that feeling or emotion from the darkness (of repression) and into the light (of conscious awareness).

Expressing feelings

There are many therapeutic or personal growth approaches (other than EFT) that encourage people to give expression to their *repressed feelings*. These varied approaches include things like repeating it out loud over and over, or yelling it into a pillow, or "dumping" it on someone, or saying it to an empty chair. The idea is that allowing it to be openly expressed without repression or negative consequences helps to release the pent up energy.

Some people feel greatly relieved to have "unloaded" their unwanted feelings. For a small minority, it sometimes seems stir up more than it releases. An important aspect of this approach is

allowing it (e.g. strong anger) to be openly expressed and released without hurting anyone or causing any damage (such as to a relationship).

Expressing repressed feelings is built into the EFT process. It allows the person to give expression to his/her feelings and emotions and to do it in a way that doesn't cause damage or have negative consequences. And, while doing this, the tapping facilitates the release of associated negative energy. EFT is also exceptionally well equipped to deal with any other related feelings, emotions or painful memories that may emerge or get stirred up while doing this, which can and does happen.

Tapping on a feeling while openly expressing it helps the person to stay focused and it also quietens the mind as there is less space for analyzing and mind chatter (which can get in the way). However, there is no strict rule that says it must be expressed out loud as there may be times when a person finds that silently focusing and tapping on the feeling or issue, while whispering it to themselves, works for them.

For the large majority, however, it works best when they give their feelings verbal expression without holding anything back or restricting it in any way. This helps to take the lid off and let it out. The best advice is to get into the feeling and say it like it feels. When needed, you can even exaggerate it a little (or a lot) or say it louder (or even shout it) while continually tapping.

Connecting with the now

While EFT is being applied, the tapping also performs an additional function. The person (rapidly or slowly) becomes more aware of this moment and more present with the feeling or emotional issue. In effect, the physical tapping is functioning as a kind of wake-up call. To start with, the person is immersed in or has his/her attention fixated on the feeling, emotion or issue. The physical, present and repetitive nature of the tapping attracts attention and sooner or later this leads to an increase in awareness of the here and now, this moment.

Typically, when a person is in a negative emotional state or has an emotional problem, he or she is either caught up in the past or projecting into the future and is not strongly connected with and aware of the now. He/she is in a *trance-like state* which may be light and temporary or it may be totally consuming or somewhere in between.

Tapping repetitively assists the client to literally wake up from this trance state into the now and become more present with and accepting of this moment. The "waking up" phenomena might occur gradually or suddenly or in stages. When this happens, the person may spontaneously experience a "cognitive shift", such as a positive change of viewpoint, a willingness to look at another's point of view, a softening of his/her position on something or even a fresh new way of regarding someone.

Some people have suggested that the tapping distracts a person from the feeling and that distraction is another reason why EFT works. The person is actually being "distracted" by the here and now. EFT helps to free up fixated attention and the person frequently becomes healthily detached from the feeling after tapping on it, and often, he/she can no longer get into that feeling or get it back even when he/she tries to.

Resistance and persistence

There is an old saying that "*what you resist, persists*" and this can be easily observed. When we really don't want to think, feel or remember something, it tends to hang around or keeps re-appearing and the more we try to not think, feel or recall it, the more persistent it becomes. A negative feeling or emotion that never goes away or keeps re-appearing indicates that it is still being resisted now (subconsciously) long after the event or events where it originated.

When faced with painful experiences in life that are overwhelming and unbearable, we do the best we can at the time, and also afterwards, to deal with the pain. In such circumstances, repression (in one form or another) is used as a way to not feel the feelings or to lessen their intensity or as an attempt to somehow escape from the pain. The consequences of that "solution" are that the person becomes fragmented and such experiences remain in an *unresolved state*, which means they are unfinished and incomplete and, therefore, potentially triggerable.

Identifying and acknowledging a negative feeling or an emotional issue is an important first step in the healing process. "*We cannot change anything unless we accept it*" - Carl Jung.

The "Setup" part of EFT (e.g. "*Even though I have this feeling,*" etc.) directly assists the client to consciously *acknowledge* and *accept* the existence of the problem, feeling, emotion or story, often for the first time. The Setup helps to reduce subconscious resistance to having that feeling or issue by bringing the feeling or issue into consciousness and opening the door to acceptance of it.

The "tapping" part of EFT then takes it further. As the client taps through the acupoints, his or her subconscious resistance to that feeling or emotion tends to wane (sooner or later) and drop away. This phenomena often happens when a "relaxation effect" occurs and the person observably relaxes, sighs, laughs or simply lets go.

Acceptance is the other side of resistance. As the resistance drops, the intensity drops. When the client is present with the feeling and fully accepts the feeling with no resistance, the feeling simply dissolves and vanishes as there is no longer any resistance holding it in place. EFT effectively facilitates this natural process.

Self-acceptance

Included in the EFT Setup is an *affirmation* of self-acceptance (e.g. "*Even though I have this feeling, I deeply and completely accept myself*" or similar).

The affirmation part of the Setup invites the person to affirm self-acceptance despite having this problem, feeling, belief, memory or similar that is being worked on. There are various ways such an affirmation can be expressed or worded as mentioned in numerous EFT articles, videos and manuals.

The primary function of the *self-acceptance affirmation* in the EFT Setup is to neutralize or at least suspend negative self-judgement and self-rejection, where that exists, so that the person is more likely to make progress. There is a widespread understanding that harsh negative self-judgements underlie most other personal issues.

Quotes: *"I find that when we really love and accept and approve of ourselves exactly as we are, everything in life works"* and *"Self-approval and self-acceptance in the now are the main keys to positive changes in every area of our lives."*- Louise Hay.

The inclusion of a self-acceptance affirmation can sometimes stir up emotional issues. Some people literally choke when asked to say those words, so powerful is their self-rejection, self-judgement and self-disapproval. Tapping on these emotional issues or feelings, if they arise, can be extremely rewarding as they are sometimes core issues or memories that underlie the current problem.

The overall purpose of the Setup is to set things up and clear the way so that the Tapping can do its job. Having said that, the Setup is not always needed every time that EFT is done and some EFT'ers simply do the Tapping and only include the Setup when progress is slow or blocked. If the Setup wasn't a part of EFT, the same issues would still be encountered and need to be addressed but by using a different approach.

The power of intention

Other than the meridian tapping, one of the most frequently suggested reasons why EFT works is intention. The subconscious mind responds more to intention than to anything else. To be effective, our intentions need to be congruent with our natural functioning and healing processes.

Quote: *"Understanding the power of intention can be transformational as you follow your unique path for personal development. Intention is the energy that powers all actions. I like to think of it as the thought behind the thought, or the thought that underpins the words, or the thought that propels actions. It's the starting place in your mind. You may be aware of your intention or not. The more you are aware of your intention, the more you will empower your personal development and growth."* - Jeanie Marshall.

If someone is doing EFT on a negative feeling with the intention of "not feeling that feeling" or to make it "go away" and "never come back" or "to never feel or think of that again", it is less likely to work or reduce all the way down to zero intensity. The reason for this is that the person is continuing to resist what is being tapped on or is attempting (intending) to exclude it from consciousness. The alternative is facing, acknowledging, accepting and

being present with it which is consistent with natural healing processes.

When using EFT, intention plays an important role and gives a powerful message to the subconscious mind.

Clients may need to be introduced to such concepts. It may be the intention to release certain emotions (such as repressed anger), or the intention to let go of something, or the intention to forgive someone, or the intention to face something, or to accept something and move on, or simply to be present with and accept the feeling as it is, or the intention that the subconscious mind will bring up the aspects of a problem one at a time and in the right order, or similar.

The role of repetition

Another reason why EFT works is the use of *repetition* which is a key part of EFT. We don't tap only once or twice on just one acupoint for a problem or feeling. We tap many times on a number of acupoints. We don't just put our attention on the feeling or issue once or a few times, we do it many times or maintain our attention on it continuously. We don't just say the problem or feeling once or a few times, we say it many times while tapping, and maybe (at the right time) also with some humour, exaggerations or variations all around it to *reframe* the issue to help the client view or interpret it differently.

If we only tapped once on one acupoint each time we did EFT, we wouldn't get anywhere near the same results that are possible. The use of repetition in EFT can be powerful, especially when combined with focusing attention and expressing the feeling, emotion or issue. Persistent tapping will often make the difference between getting somewhere or getting nowhere when a feeling or issue is particularly resistant.

Repetition is used widely in many meditations (such as in mantras and chanting) and has been for thousands of years. Some therapeutic techniques also make use of repetition where something is repeated many times or a certain action or question is repeated (such as touching something or repeatedly asking the same open-ended question) which can help to peel the onion.

When doing EFT, the use of repetitive tapping and repeating the reminder phrase often reduces or stops mind chatter. This may be important because it's possible that this makes the space within which emotional healing can take place. It's not uncommon for clients to find themselves in a calm or meditative state, sometimes even a still mind, at least for awhile, after tuning in and doing repetitive tapping.

Pattern interruption

A particular brain pattern is re-formed or re-generated again and again in response to reminders of a specific painful memory. This brain pattern is the same every time that it is triggered and it generates the same emotional response with its electrical activity and biochemical reactions that are experienced as feelings, sensations or impulses.

An alternative explanation of what is going on when we do EFT is that the tapping supports a natural process called "pattern interruption".

An article on EFT entitled "Emotional Rescue" by Dr Nick Baylis from Cambridge University offers the following explanation: *"When we confront a problem by focusing on the disturbing thought, our usual pattern of upsetting responses is not only disrupted but overwritten by new and calming sensory information from our tapping on sensitive acupoints. This ... explanation is particularly convincing since it's an established psychological phenomena that we can benefit from intercepting and overwriting the messages sent between our brain and body."* See my web site for a full copy of this article, published by The Australian newspaper in August 2007.

Observable *relaxation responses* frequently occur while tapping though the acupoints, most often manifesting as a sigh or laughter. Gary Craig points this out many times when it happens during the live sessions recorded in his EFT videos. Psychologist, Steve Wells, writes that: *"EFT is a process of tapping on the meridian points of traditional Chinese acupuncture whilst focusing on emotional problems. Most people who do so experience a relaxation response almost immediately, as well as a lessening of the problem emotion and more positive thinking patterns."*

Using brain monitoring equipment, rapid and observable changes in brain waves have been observed while tapping on emotional issues. Experts Gary Groesbeck and Donna Bach report that they have seen evidence that EFT works at a verifiable level in the field of brain wave measurements and have made some amazing observations that were instantly visible during actual tapping sessions by Gary Craig. They report that: *"Initial field studies show some very rapid and significant changes in the overall brain wave patterns that mirror the release of emotional issues during sessions, and a movement towards a more optimal brain function."*

Aspects

A very important concept in EFT is that most problems are made up of a number of contributing elements, known in EFT as "aspects". Examples are negative emotions and feelings, limiting beliefs, unhelpful attitudes, painful memories, old solutions and decisions (that aren't relevant any more), and so on. Some problems only have a few "aspects", whereas some other problems (such as self-esteem issues) may have up to hundreds.

It is important that EFT practitioners and anyone who self-applies or otherwise uses EFT takes the trouble to develop a good understanding of aspects and learns some effective ways of breaking problems down into their component parts. This gives EFT more specific targets to tap on. It is especially needed when faced with long term, complex and multi-layered issues.

Gary Craig's analogy of a "forest" (as the problem) and its "trees" (the various aspects that make up the problem) is very useful. It is also honest as it

acknowledges the reality of the situation, the real problem. This concept allows progress to be made with even the most difficult problems by focusing and working on specific "trees".

Those who use EFT but don't have a good grasp of aspects, or who haven't learned any of the proven strategies for identifying them, usually tap on general issues or the problem as a whole. This limits the results that EFT is capable of and the person may give up, thinking that EFT doesn't work. Even then, EFT often still weaves its magic, especially if a general issue is tapped on regularly and persistently.

Learning about aspects is open-ended in that you can use what you have already learnt and gradually learn more as you proceed along the emotional healing highway. EFT is an invaluable tool for the journey of life.

EFT toolkit

As we have already discussed, there is a lot more to EFT than just tapping on acupoints. EFT stands for Emotional Freedom Techniques (plural). The same basic EFT tapping technique, or a shortcut version of it, is used as part of every other EFT technique. These other EFT techniques, that all include and make use of the Tapping, are designed for *specific purposes* and enhance the breadth and depth of EFT's potential effectiveness.

For example, the Movie Technique is for resolving painful memories. When using this technique, each emotionally intense part of or moment in a particular event gets "tapped on" separately (using the same basic tapping technique each time) to reduce its intensity. This is done until the whole event no longer has any emotionally intense parts when the story is told by the client.

The first thing that someone new to EFT learns is the EFT tapping technique as described in Gary Craig's book "The EFT Manual" or in any of the free downloadable EFT manuals (although some only teach a shortcut version of EFT). There is more to learn about EFT and how to use it. One of the great things about EFT is that you can start with learning just the tapping technique and be able to use it straight away on every-day issues, and then grow with it as you gradually learn and develop more skills.

The results that the Tapping can bring about can be greatly enhanced by also learning certain other key EFT techniques and strategies. When working on complex problems, the most profound and lasting results are often the result of using these additional and essential EFT techniques and skills plus persistence when needed. These skills can be easily learnt and gradually developed by doing EFT training workshops and also watching quality EFT videos and reading EFT newsletters.

It is vital that professional EFT practitioners thoroughly learn and develop these skills. Non-professional EFT practitioners who are self-applying EFT and/or also using it with friends, family, etc. would also benefit greatly from learning these simple and relatively easy to learn foundational skills and strategies.

Ownership and responsibility

Our own personal healing is accelerated when we take responsibility for and accept ownership of our own feelings, emotions and emotional issues.

An EFT practitioner, coach or therapist can facilitate, educate, guide, encourage, point and even gently push, but basically no-one else can actually do our emotional healing for us, no more than he/she can live our lives for us.

Accepting ownership of our feelings and emotions is not always easy to do, especially where we hold someone else responsible for something that may have happened long ago. However, we all know deep down that blaming others does not lead to emotional healing or inner peace.

The simple truth is that whatever happened back then is not happening now. Thus, we must be subconsciously re-generating the emotional responses now. In other words, we are actually doing it to ourselves whether we consciously know that or not.

The positive side of this is that if we are doing it to ourselves, then we can cease doing it. How would it be if becoming free of a debilitating feeling or issue depended entirely on someone else doing or saying something to us such as delivering a genuine apology or righting a wrong? We might end up waiting forever.

When doing EFT, there is an unstated assumption that clients can and will accept ownership of their feelings or issues. EFT comes from that point of view. When we recognize one of our feelings or issues and acknowledge it in the setup and use it as the "reminder phrase" while tapping on each acupoint, we are being encouraged to accept and own it whether we realize that or not. When we fully own it and cease resisting it, we have arrived at truth and emotional freedom happens.

The client perspective

There has been a lot written and taught about how to get excellent results when using EFT and how to use EFT for this or that particular issue. It is ongoing as EFT continues to grow and evolve.

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Almost all of these articles, books and videos are from a *practitioner perspective*.

There is another viewpoint that is also important and that is *the client's perspective*. How can someone get more out of an EFT session as a client or when self-applying it?

An EFT session is essentially a *team activity* where the client and the practitioner work closely together but have different roles and responsibilities. Both have a responsibility to contribute to the session and to take responsibility for its success. A functional EFT session is not an activity where the client has a "fix me" attitude, sits back, contributes nothing and waits for something to be done to him/her which will somehow magically make all of his/her problems go away.

When self-applying EFT, the person is both the *practitioner* (running the session) and the *client* (having the session) and he/she is responsible for both of these "hats" as they are swapped back and forth during the session.

My eBook "*Getting the Most from EFT*" is almost entirely from the *client's perspective*. It provides information, understandings, insights and practical advice that will help individuals to be much more effective as a client or when self-applying EFT. This eBook is available via my web site.

The eBook is useful for *EFT practitioners* as well, especially those who recognize that their clients would benefit from being encouraged, educated and coached to become more effective and successful as clients. Getting them to read it or going over selected parts of it with them may help to clarify what is optimally required of them *before, during* and *between* sessions.

It outlines how to maximize the benefits from EFT sessions by knowing how they can proactively *contribute to* and *participate in* their EFT sessions more effectively and enhance the teamship with their practitioner.

Happy tapping for emotional clearing and inner peace!