

Tapping therapy: curing physical and mental problems

Beverley Turner tries out 'tapping', a technique designed to cure physical and mental problems by tapping on the body's invisible energy pathways.

By Beverley Turner

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Singer Michael Ball was seen doing it on a daytime TV chat show. He learnt it from the late singer, Stephen Gately, who used it to calm his own performance nerves. Lily Allen's weight loss was attributed to its efficacy. American PGA players have been spotted doing it around the golf course. And Norwegian pole-vaulter Rens Blom credited his unexpected 2005 World Championship Gold to its powers. The internet reveals millions of anecdotal accounts of its success on phobias, addictions and anxiety. So nearing the end of my own two-year psychotherapy training, I wanted to discover what this mysterious "tapping" business is all about.



Beverley Turner tries out "tapping" Photo: ANDREW CROWLEY

So I signed up for a day course at the EFT (Emotional Freedom Techniques) Academy in London's Regent's College, with Richard Mark, an advanced EFT practitioner and certified trainer, who has worked as a psychotherapist and hypnotherapist for 12 years. My fellow students are a mixed bunch of mental health professionals, lawyers, physiotherapists, trainee counsellors and full-time parents. Unafraid to challenge, the students are surprisingly curious and sceptical rather than gullible. There isn't a sandal or kaftan among them.

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Although it doesn't rigidly follow his teachings, Mark's course is based on the EFT therapy developed by American, Gary Craig in 1997. Craig had studied Dr. Callaghan's Thought Field Therapy in the 1980s, an evolution of John Diamond's Kinesiology, both of which were rooted in ancient Eastern "meridian energy" theories of acupuncture and Shiatsu, codified since at least 1000BC.

These therapies claimed that our bodies contain invisible energy pathways – meridians – and identified hundreds of acupoints at junctions along these interconnecting highways. They can be disrupted by life's vicissitudes; in extreme cases, resulting in not only mental but also physical problems.

EFT works by a person tapping on just nine of these acupoints, while speaking aloud. And this is where it becomes a little weird. Working in pairs we identify a minor physical ailment and repeat the phrase, "Even though I have this sore knee / headache / lack of energy, I deeply and completely accept myself," while tapping on the meridian points: the soft part of the hand beneath the little finger, crown of the head, around the eyes, beneath the nose, the chin, near the clavicle and beneath the armpit. I just about resist the urge to "ooh ooh" like a monkey.

A key part of the therapy is calibrating the intensity of either physical or emotional pain, which allows both therapist and patient a tangible scale by which to measure success. Mark explains that EFT is "especially effective in clearing traumatic memories: accidents, abuse, violence, childhood memories; or even clearing persistent negative messages from family or key people in our lives."

We move onto emotional problems, selecting a memory that is difficult, but manageable in the limited time available, and within a classroom environment. Using the "Movie Technique," we must make a mental movie of a specific event, giving it a title and running it in our mind's eye, marking its intensity between 1 – 10, before tapping with the mantra, "Even though I have this playground bullying / car accident / illness diagnosis movie, I deeply and completely accept myself." In extreme cases of trauma, the patient can merely imagine the units of distress without running the movie in their head, gradually moving towards the scene at a safe pace.

In spite of – or perhaps because of – the adrenaline from feeling like a bit of a wally, when using the "Movie Technique" myself my own memory of witnessing a violent assault twenty years ago, does indeed fade in its intensity. But I'm not a prime candidate. EFT has impressive results on a whole spectrum of emotional issues but is arguably making its biggest impact on those suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Treating such patients, Marta Krol, a Polish clinical psychologist who trained under Mark and has returned to Poland, has found EFT's effects "amazing". She recounts a 12-year-old Chechnyan girl suffering speech and anxiety problems as a result of witnessing, aged six, her uncle's dismembered body brought into the family home and laid on the kitchen table by hysterical relatives. The child did not speak at all for the following 12 months.

"We had worked together for six months with little progress," says Krol, "Then I tried EFT. She pictured herself watching the terrible scene on TV but through another TV and so on until she was five levels removed and even then she saw herself watching from behind the curtains. But after six weeks she was talking fluently and could recount the event with no anxiety. I honestly believe I could not have helped her do that without EFT."

Emma-Leigh Johnson, a London-based drugs counsellor is unequivocal about its benefits, "By the time clients come to me they have had lots of therapy. They know what to say, the games to play and boxes to tick. EFT is so unusual, they don't know what you want to hear."

Few therapies allow a patient to say aloud that they accept themselves despite their rape / abuse / addiction, while dealing with the emotions that arise simultaneously. Johnson explains, "lots of therapy separates the issue and the human being. With this you can change how you feel about something, but accept that you can't change what happened – that's the emotional freedom. I see bigger shifts using EFT than any other therapy."

Some clients prefer to be 'tapped upon' by the therapist; others will mirror their actions; but perhaps more than any other therapy, EFT equips the individual to take away the skill to use at any time.

EFT is still ripe for ridicule. Having explained it in broad terms to my husband, he can now be heard muttering, "I may not have unstacked the dishwasher but I deeply and completely accept myself." But I have no doubt that the sound of tapping is here to stay. And it's only going to get louder.

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