



EFT RESEARCH

Does EFT Therapy Work?

Since its development, over 100 articles have been published demonstrating the effectiveness of tapping. In 2020, the American Psychological Association (APA) published a study showing a single hour of tapping to reduce the biological markers of stress in individuals experiencing a range of symptoms related to psychological distress such as anxiety, depression, and interpersonal sensitivity.¹ It can also reduce symptoms of chronic stress, chronic pain, and testing/performance anxiety.

How EFT Works

One of the earliest neurological explanations of how acupoint tapping might produce therapeutic change was based on the findings of a 10-year research program at Harvard Medical School investigating the effects of acupuncture. Among the research team's conclusions was that stimulating selected acupoints generates extensive deactivation in the amygdala and other areas of the limbic system: "Functional MRI and PET studies on acupuncture at commonly used acupuncture points have demonstrated significant modulatory effects on the limbic system, paralimbic, and subcortical gray structures".²

The premise based on these findings, as applied to energy psychology, was that "manually stimulating a set of acupuncture points . . . decreases activation signals in areas of the amygdala and other brain structures involved with fear".³ These effects, as shown by the fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) and PET (positron emission tomography) studies, are virtually instantaneous.

EFT Tapping for Test Anxiety

One research study specifically looked at the effectiveness of tapping in reducing test anxiety, finding it was as effective as the technique of progressive muscle relaxation. Students who received tapping treatment ALSO improved their test scores and reported less emotionality and worry.⁴

EFT Tapping for Anxiety

A review of the literature found that tapping helped significantly reduce symptoms related to anxiety. In one study comparing EFT to cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), 90% of those who received EFT had significant improvement in symptoms compared to 63% of those who received CBT. Additionally, tapping was effective without any augmentation from medication. It took only three sessions for results as compared to 15 for CBT.⁵

Other studies have found tapping to be effective in treating anxiety in a number of populations including adolescents, students, healthcare workers, and a variety of adults.^{6,7,8,9}

The reduction of anxiety symptoms is maintained after treatment, with one study finding participants still experiencing reduced symptoms three months later.¹⁰

EFT Tapping for Depression

A review and meta-analysis of studies on the effect of EFT in reducing depression found that tapping reduced symptoms by 41%. It also found that the effects of tapping were larger than the effects seen in antidepressant drug trials.¹⁰ Like in tapping for other mental health conditions, symptom reduction was sustained over time.⁵

Studies that looked at individuals experiencing multiple mental health conditions such as a combination of anxiety, depression, and PTSD have found that tapping helps to reduce symptoms for all conditions, including depression.⁷ One study found that compared to cognitive behavioral therapy, symptom reduction was not immediate but showed up three and six months after EFT treatment.⁶

EFT Tapping for Chronic Pain

Numerous studies suggest tapping may be a promising adjunct to treatment for those who suffer from chronic pain. In one study, patients with fibromyalgia participated in an eight-week virtual program. Various aspects of chronic pain including rumination, magnification, and helplessness were reduced, as were symptoms of anxiety and depression.¹¹

A study with individuals suffering from frequent tension-type headaches found that routine tapping twice a day for two months reduced both the frequency and intensity of tension headaches.¹² Another study focused on acute pain in individuals who had just undergone surgery. Those who received five minutes of tapping for three days post-surgery experienced significantly less pain than those who received no tapping treatment.¹³

EFT for PTSD

Integrating tapping into treatment for PTSD has been shown to significantly reduce symptoms including flashbacks and nightmares, insomnia, trouble concentrating, isolation, hypervigilance, and aggression. In one study, survivors of the Rwandan genocide were treated with a single session of tapping. After treatment, PTSD symptoms were significantly reduced and improvements were maintained at a two-year follow-up.¹⁴

A study with vets suffering from PTSD found similar effects — after six sessions of tapping, 90% of participants no longer met the criteria for PTSD. These improvements were maintained at a six-month follow-up.¹⁵

EFT for Other Mental Health Issues

Studies have found that tapping can help to address specific phobias, both reducing the anxiety related to the phobia and increasing the ability to approach the object of the phobia.¹⁸ Another study found that a single session of tapping resulted in treatment gains that were maintained six and nine months post-treatment.¹⁷

Tapping appears to be effective in not only reducing the psychological symptoms of burnout and stress but also in reducing the biological markers for stress.¹⁸ The study published by the American Psychological Association in 2020 showed that cortisol, the main stress hormone, is significantly reduced after a session of tapping.¹ This finding is significant, as tapping is a non-invasive, non-pharmacological intervention that costs nothing and can be done anywhere.

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FURTHER READING:

American Psychological Association

Energy psychology: A review of the preliminary evidence

<https://psycnet.apa.org/doiLanding?doi=10.1037%2F0033-3204.45.2.199>

Harvard Medical School

Article Index on Acupuncture

https://hms.harvard.edu/search-results?as_q=Acupuncture