

Coach Thyself: Healing Trauma with Emotional Freedom Techniques



In the Fall issue of *Yoga Living*, I acquainted you with the simple neurology of trauma—a response of your nervous system to the overwhelm of prolonged stress, or sudden mortal crisis. It’s your body’s built-in way of coping. It can be crucial for surviving in the short run, but also leave you with troublesome, unassimilated memory traces. The problem is those memories emerge again later in life and blur your perception of the present. They can trigger in situations that don’t really call for them responses similar to those you had in the crisis or stress. And that, in turn, throws you off balance socially, emotionally, and physically.

But I also said that, in addition to understanding trauma better, we have some new and impressive ways of healing it. One set of these, called Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) by their originator, Gary Craig—is surprisingly simple. So simple you can easily learn and work with it on your own. Basically, you bring up the old, problematic responses while reciting a mantra of self-acceptance—and simultaneously tapping slowly on the ends of certain acupuncture meridians.

Most of the research and practical procedures arising from EFT have been gifted to the public. This means you can go to and download very accessible information that will teach you “the basic recipe.”¹ While professional practitioners have a variety of ways of determining which acupuncture meridian ends to tap on for this or that problem—the basic recipe simply covers them all in a two-minute process. This makes it

ideal for releasing on a “do it yourself” basis the leftover arousal of your nervous system around stress, pain, or illness.

On the basis of both personal experience and professional training, I can attest that, despite my own initial skepticism, EFT really helps. When you home in carefully on the feelings behind stressful, painful, or out-of-proportion responses—the calming impact of the basic recipe can be very impressive. It’s not magic, of course. Sometimes you have to tap your same troublesome reactions several times, or repeatedly over a period of days. And there are deeper, more complex forms of trauma—such as those you may carry for others in your family system—that can require different remedies and/or professional help.

That said, however, EFT’s release of upset, aggravated, or fearful states of arousal is a bit amazing. Something that really used to be a problem for you, whenever it happened, can quickly become... ho-hum, normal. Maybe it’s still not your favorite thing, but it’s also no longer any big deal. It simply no longer triggers an inappropriate reaction.

The EFT Manual gives examples of a broad range of common ailments and particular emotional and physical problems the process has been found to work for. In general, it can relieve various fears and phobias, traumatic memories, and addictions, and hasten recovery from some chronic illnesses as well. It has been used to improve artistic or athletic performance. Among the case studies in the book are: fears or phobias around public speaking, needles, spiders, and elevators;

addictions to coffee, alcohol, nicotine, and peanut M&M’s; relief of asthma, anxiety with nail biting, overlong grieving, low back pain, constipation, and insomnia.

Increasingly, there is now solid scientific proof, in the classic form of randomized double-blind research studies, that EFT works.² Its effects are lasting, and arise from the process itself—not the placebo effect, or some charismatic healer who happens to be applying it. But why does it work? The picture that is emerging is this. Careful focus on the problem, coupled with an affirmation of self-acceptance and the meridian tapping, produces measurable changes in the brain and hormonal system. The whole neurological stress response is told to “stand down,” which allows the brain to start processing any unassimilated memories of being overwhelmed. This also restores function to digestion, the immune system, and many other things the body does to create health when it is at peace.

Despite what may be a sense of surprise that tapping while reciting particular sentences can help solve major problems in life, EFT is doing just that now for millions of people. It’s a simple, inexpensive, powerful process suitable in many cases for home use. It works well on most kinds of personal trauma. Learning about it could be well worth your while. ▲

Footnotes & References

¹www.eftfree.net offers a free manual for download

²*The EFT Manual* by Gary Craig, Energy Psychology Press; 2nd Edition