

Tap it out

A simple way to soothe stress, aches and anxiety is at your fingertips

HEAD DOWN, HANDS TO TEMPLES

– it's a natural response to life's tense moments. And for good reason, because it turns out that impromptu head massage is one small step away from an effective anxiety-busting method known as tapping.

Combining the principles of Chinese acupuncture with modern psychology techniques, tapping (aka emotional freedom techniques or EFT) involves using your fingers to lightly drum pressure points on your face, hands and body to relieve pain, anxiety and stress. A little weird, yes... But according to a stack of research, it also totally works.

A review of around 40 studies in the journal *Psychology* in 2013 found that tapping can significantly reduce anxiety, pain, post-traumatic stress, food cravings and more. Other studies have shown that it eases test anxiety and boosts sports performance. But just how this technique actually works to calm a freaked-out mind is still up for debate.

"The fact is, we know it does work," says psychologist Steve Wells (eftdownunder.com), who's developed a pared-back version of tapping

called simple energy techniques (SET). "One of the things that has been discovered through MRIs, which look at what's happening in the brain, is that when people are tapping on these points, it reduces the levels of stress chemicals in the system. It also changes brainwave patterns to more delta waves, which interrupt the anxiety-producing messengers."

Another theory centres on the Chinese philosophy of energy, or chi, and the idea that blockages to the flow of energy in the body can result in emotional upset, pain and discomfort. Tapping accesses a handful of acupressure points – there are 365 in total, but seven on the face and upper body are the most commonly used – to physically 'clear' these blockages, stimulate chi and generally produce a Zen state of mind.

"I personally believe that emotions have to process through the body and this helps that process," says Wells.

TAP HERE TO RELAX

There are a few ways you can use this technique to access your body's in-built calming

power. The original version, EFT, teams tapping with a self-nurturing mantra. So you might repeat, "Even though I feel stressed, I still completely accept myself" while tapping several times on points on your face, chest and body.

Wells' SET uses a simplified method, replacing the mantras with thoughts focused on your issue, making it easier to take tapping on the go when you really need it (just in case you don't feel comfortable drumming your face while talking to yourself in public!).

"People can get confused about what words to say [when tapping], but we found that simply focusing on the problem is enough," explains Wells. "All you really need to do is tap gently on the points – if you know nothing else but a few of the points and you tap on them, you're going to get something happening."

So how do you tap? It's simple. The classic tapping points are the start of the eyebrow, the temple, under the eye, on the upper lip, on the chin, under the collarbone, under the arm and on the base of the hands. Using two fingers of your dominant hand, gently tap these points around five to 15 times while thinking about your problem. You can

"All you really need to do is tap gently on the points ... to get something happening"

also gently massage the points for a more discreet fix.

Need something you can do in the heat of the moment? "One of the simplest methods we teach is to tap on the finger points using the thumb of the same hand," says Wells. "You can take that anywhere, even in the boardroom you can be tapping on the points and reduce your anxiety."

Using your dominant hand, simply tap your thumb on the side of each finger on the same hand between five and 15 times and take a deep breath to finish.

KNOCK OUT NERVES

Whether you've got a big presentation looming, your first 10K race or there's simply an important conversation you need to have, a little tapping could help you settle the nerves that would usually make you run from the limelight.

Zoe Timmers, a high jumper who had a top 10 finish at last year's Commonwealth Games, used SET to treat her anxiety after returning to the

sport post-injury. "I thought the technique was a bit odd at first, but I had faith in it after hearing about other athletes using it," she admits. "I did wonder what people would think if they saw me sitting and tapping my face!"

Putting self-consciousness aside, Zoe introduced SET to her warm-up routine to avoid second-guessing her abilities on the field. "It really helped settle my anxiety whenever I was feeling nervous before a competition," she says. "It would only take a couple of minutes to settle my nerves."

Interestingly, tapping seems to be able to work without the need for positive thinking or visualisation exercises – super handy if you can't yet see a silver lining to your situation. "In this technique you actually focus on the negative and tap on the points, and the negative image doesn't upset you anymore – it no longer has any power over you," Wells explains.

Thankfully, you don't have to be an athlete gearing up to compete on the world stage to benefit from this trick. "I would definitely recommend tapping to anybody dealing with anxiety or stress," says Zoe.

And Wells agrees: "We recommend people do it every day because some people don't realise how stressed they are," he explains. "So you can do it in a way where you focus on problems, and you can also do it in a way that's like emotional fitness, where you tap on the points each day to get an ongoing benefit. Generally, if people do 10 to 15 minutes a day, they'll notice a result."

Get used to tapping on the points while watching TV, chatting on the phone or going for a walk for an easy de-stress session after work. And next time tension hits, you'll have a simple fix: tap that. 

3 ways to stress less

Enhance your tapping practice with these soothing buys



TEA TIME
Pukka Serene Jasmine Green tea bags, \$7.95, pukkaherbs.com.au



LIGHT UP
Glasshouse Amalfi Coast Triple Scented Candle, \$39.95, glasshousefragrances.com



ROLL ON
Tata Harper Aromatic Stress Treatment, \$95, iamnaturalstore.com.au

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