

The Physiology of Success

How EFT removes invisible blocks to peak performance

**By Bernadette Hunter, M.S., LPC,
Performance Specialist**

Energy Psychology (EP) is a relatively new discipline. The first national professional meeting in the United States was just held in 1999. As with any new groundbreaking work in the field of psychology and human behavior, the initial reports of success have been anecdotal — in the human experience of results. Energy Psychology and Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), as one specific EP technique, have earned high praise from those who try it for resolution of physical pain, anxiety, addictions, weight loss, serious illness and disease, and for all sports, business and other peak-performance areas.

A scientist at heart, I know that it is in the laboratory of research that any method convinces those who say “show me the science.” These methods are different from our methodologies of old, mainly in the fact that their results are rapid and powerful — often too good to sound true. But we are now seeing the research from many esteemed cellular biologists, pharmacologists, psychologists and physicians validating the acclaimed results of such energy psychology methods.

The purpose for my writing this paper is twofold:

1. To provide you with a scientific foundation for the cutting-edge field of Energy Psychology, and one of its techniques, Emotional Freedom Technique ([EFT](#)).
2. To assist in the understanding that these tools are easily available to you. EP tools such as EFT provide simple, self-empowering techniques to change beliefs and perceptions at a cellular level, providing rapid, lasting, deep shifts in how you see yourself and how you are able to perform in the world.

Below, I discuss the work and writings of four prominent scientists and investigators, major figures in the field of energy psychology who have devoted significant time and energy to the exploration of the process and benefits of EFT. If you would like to pursue more in-depth information on this method, please see my [Resources](#) page for listings of scientific reports, educational websites and books.

[Dr. Bruce H. Lipton](#), is a cellular biologist, author and lecturer, formerly served as an associate professor of anatomy at the University of Wisconsin where he participated in the medical curriculum as a lecturer on cell biology and histology. More recently, as a pathology fellow at Stanford University’s School of Medicine, his research on the human immune system yielded information on the molecular nature of consciousness and the future of human evolution. He has done groundbreaking work in the field of epigenetics, which investigates how environmental factors influence genes. Dr. Lipton is the author of *The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter and Miracles*. He can be heard in an [interview on YouTube](#).

As one of many scientists re-examining the body-mind connection, Dr. Lipton has challenged the conventional scientific belief that genes determine everything about a human being. In his 2005 book *The Biology of Belief*, he writes,

It is not gene-directed hormones and neurotransmitters that control our bodies and our minds; our beliefs control our bodies, our minds and thus our lives.

From his own endeavors and studies in numerous fields, this eminent medical researcher turns this former idea on its head, noting that it is now acknowledged that our perceptions or interpretation of our environment controls the activity of our genes through a process known as “epigenetic control.” Instead of thinking of the body as a mechanical device, this new view incorporates the role of mind and spirit. Through a combination of research in cell biology and quantum physics, this new thinking has discovered that energetic signals from outside the cell — signals from our own thoughts — determine our well-being. In other words, healing is made possible by changing our perceptions or beliefs.

So what does this mean in the field of human performance? It means that it is possible to achieve peak performance simply by retraining your thinking.

Here’s an example from one of my clients: An opera client is struggling, has a tight throat and is not hitting the high notes; just not singing in her world-class voice. She is telling herself various negative ideas, and there are thoughts coming from her unconscious about former failures, fears, even successes. After just a few rounds of EFT, tapping on specific points on her face and collarbone while simultaneously using thoughts associated with her fears, her throat relaxes, her shoulders drop down, her sense of possibility about being able to sing at top form returns. And, of course, the proof is the next day when she rehearses and it all goes “right.” This is but one example of how the EFT tapping releases fear from the cells, shifting the negativity to thoughts of possibility and more optimal performance.

As Dr. Lipton reminds us, the 50 trillion individual cells in our bodies grow and maintain the body if the mind believes the environment is safe and supportive.

However, in stressful situations, cells will adopt a defensive “protection” posture, foregoing their normal growth functions ... [G]rowth processes are restricted or suspended ... With chronic stress, energy demands interfere with the required maintenance of the body and this leads to dysfunction and disease.

Bringing this cellular phenomenon back to EFT work, consider this simplified explanation of what really happens in an EFT treatment. First, beliefs produce emotions which are manifested as chemicals in the body. A preponderance of negative beliefs (most of which are in the unconscious) will conjure up fear, anxiety, anger, sadness, a feeling of weakness, which produce chemicals that become lodged in the cell receptor sites.

When we have emotional reactions to experiences or thoughts or beliefs, chemicals are released by the hypothalamus. If the cells are choked with these chemicals, nutrients and proteins can’t enter that cell receptor site. Over time, these sites shrink and die and when the cell divides, there are now more cell

receptor sites for that same chemical, which is really just an emotion, and fewer receptor sites for nutrients.

With the EFT work of tapping while addressing the thought, belief or emotion at hand, the cell receptor sites can unlock and release the negative emotion by releasing the chemicals in the cells. There is literally an “unlocking” of the negative emotion with its negative belief. Beliefs shift. The opera singer now believes she can sing those high notes well, and her physiology has shifted so she can. And she does.

[Dr. Candace Pert, Ph.D.](#) is an internationally recognized pharmacologist who has published over 350 scientific articles and has lectured worldwide on pharmacology, neuro-anatomy, and her own leading-edge research on emotions and the body-mind connection. Dr. Pert earned her Ph.D. in pharmacology from the School of Medicine at Johns Hopkins University, played a prominent role in brain biochemistry research at the Clinical Neuroscience Branch of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), was a research professor of physiology and biophysics at Georgetown University School of Medicine in Washington, D.C. She is the author of the book *Molecules of Emotion: The Scientific Basis Behind Mind-Body Medicine* (Scribner, 1997).

Dr. Pert’s pioneering research has shown how chemicals in the body are the biological foundation of our awareness, our beliefs, emotions and expectations, which determine how we experience and respond to our world. As she says, these biochemical messengers “act with intelligence:” They convey information, setting in motion a huge array of behaviors, both conscious and unconscious, by means of a neural network that links all our systems and organs. This engages what she calls “molecules of emotions.” In a sense, this means our brain “travels” throughout the body. Our means of guiding ourselves through life is this shifting, changing feedback loop that gives and takes information all at once. She goes on to say that:

[T]hese biochemicals are the physiological substrates of emotion, the molecular underpinnings of what we experience as feelings, sensations, thought, drives, perhaps even spirit or soul.

Focusing on the question of what makes us feel the way we do, Dr. Pert synthesized her own laboratory work and experience of mind-body therapies with research from leading theorists of emotion and the work of neuroscientists from all over the world. She began to understand the importance of emotion in freeing people from patterns of behavior that sap energy, joy and health.

If we accept the idea that peptides and other informational substances are the biochemicals of emotion, their distribution in the body’s nerves has all kinds of significance, which Sigmund Freud, were he alive today, would gleefully point out as the molecular confirmation of his theories! Repressed traumas caused by overwhelming emotion can be stored in a body part, thereafter affecting our ability to feel that part or even move it. The new work suggests there are almost infinite pathways for the conscious mind to access — and modify — the unconscious mind and the body.

In EFT, the stimulation of specific points on the body by tapping causes skin receptors to send signals to the brain. In energy-based therapy, this stimulation is paired with having the client mentally engage a

troubling thought, feeling or image (such as, “I hate my putter” or the “I can’t get over losing my pet” or “I will always be angry at losing that promotion”).

When a person thinks about a troubling situation, brain-imaging techniques reveal that signals are sent to various regions of the brain. Many emotional problems, for instance, involve an over-stimulation of areas in the brain (the amygdala and other areas of the limbic system). The signals sent by tapping energy points on the skin, and the signals generated by engaging a mental problem, interact in a manner that reduces and eliminates symptoms.

Take, for example, my client “Mary.” Mary comes to me for help for a variety of reasons, one of which is her timidity at school board meetings. Mary is smart, though she believes she is stupid and has nothing of value to offer. She is a member of two important boards in her community. Each time she feels the desire to give her opinion, she gets highly anxious, her heart beats faster and she feels paralyzed. She’s an important member on these boards, but she feels held back from contributing in ways that even she thinks would be beneficial to the group.

Fast forward to what we find out in our sessions: Mary fainted while giving an oral report in World History in the 7th grade. She was met with no compassion or understanding of what had just happened. Now at the age of 57, Mary recounts how, from that day forward, she never took another class that might include even a remote chance of needing to give an oral response or report. Here is a very smart woman who bypassed important learning, did not go to college figuring she was too stupid, and now saw herself many decades later as limited in what she could offer her community.

We did EFT on the 7th grade fainting. Most likely Mary had a panic attack. It left these emotions (remember, these are chemicals) of high anxiety and a belief that she was stupid lodged in her cells. By applying EFT to this memory, Mary was able to quite quickly dislodge the chemicals and arrive at a neutral emotional state about the whole incident. (In fact, what happens frequently is that when the emotions dislodge and have full expression, the picture of the event begins to actually fade; the image becomes unclear, the emotions are no longer present, and the belief of “I’m stupid” shifts.) This was achieved by the stimulation of the tapping, which allowed the chemicals to release from the cell receptor sites, rise to consciousness and be fully expressed and so that buried thought patterns can then shift to positive, self-enhancing thoughts and beliefs.

Mary is now the chair of a major committee that is building a performing arts and cultural center in her community. She reports that she’s enjoying the new-found freedom to contribute to any meeting or social situation, feeling confident about what she has to offer.

[Dr. Masaru Emoto](#) was born in Japan and is a graduate of Yokohama Municipal University and the Opener International University with a doctorate in alternative medicine. He is the author of: *The Hidden Messages in Water* and *The Secret Life of Water*.

Dr. Emoto’s well-known experiments used high-speed photos of frozen water crystals that showed changes when specific, concentrated thoughts were directed toward the water, showing that water can absorb, hold and even retransmit human emotions.

The studies began with identical glasses with identical amounts and kinds of water. Dr. Emoto directed loving, compassionate thoughts toward the first glass of water and thoughts of anger, hatred and negativity toward the second glass of water. The water crystals in the first glass showed brilliant, complex and colorful snowflake patterns, while the water exposed to negative thoughts formed incomplete, asymmetrical patterns with dull colors.

Dr. Emoto's theories extrapolated the results to human beings, since the human body is almost completely water. His photographs give us a striking image of the physiological impact of our own thoughts: Cellular structures have dramatic responses to thoughts.

The same theory underlies the work in EFT. During the set-up phase of the EFT sequencing, we pair the statement regarding the client's negative emotion or negative thought with a statement of love and acceptance. An example: "Even though I'm really anxious about my final exams, I deeply and completely love and accept myself." Sound silly? Perhaps. But when you actually experience what happens in your body — the release of the anxiety, the relaxation of your muscles, tendons, ligaments, etc., in the areas that were tight and heavy, you just don't mind saying such a positive thing.

Dr. Emoto's experiments make clear that this is scientifically sound and it supports the straightforward approach that EFT offers. If I was working with a person who had killed someone because of drunk driving, we would use this same formula: "Even though I feel incredible shame and guilt because I killed someone, I deeply and completely love and accept myself." The pairing of stating the negative emotion that is lodged in the body, along with the statement of love and acceptance, begins to change the physiology in the cells. With the addition of the signals sent to the brain from the tapping, we have a very powerful tool for resolving afflicting emotions, self-recrimination, long-held conflicts, chronic physical pain, and in my specialty area, blocks to optimal performance in sports, the arts and in business.

[Dawson Church, Ph.D.](#), was mentored by distinguished neurosurgeon Norman Shealy, M.D., Ph.D., the founder of the American Holistic Medical Association. He studied under Dr. Shealy's guidance at Holos University and earned doctorate degrees in both integrative healthcare and natural medicine.

Church has actively researched leading-edge healing techniques in several scientific studies at private institutions, including Kaiser Permanente. He is a member of the Research Committee of the Association for Comprehensive Energy Psychology (ACEP). His 2008 book *The Genie in Your Genes: Epigenetic Medicine and the New Biology of Intention*, covers the latest studies on consciousness and DNA. Leading authorities have hailed the book as a brilliant contribution to the field.

Dr. Church's work concentrates on the changeability of human genes, which have been shown to change from moment to moment according to our thoughts and feelings. He supports the idea that the act of tapping on meridian points on the body, combined with the use of carefully chosen words, can cause immediate changes in the body on a deep cellular level.

Among the groundbreaking research in his book, he discusses how genes are turned on and off, every day, by our beliefs, feelings and attitudes. It is this idea that underlies the success of EFT. As Dr. Church

informs us, every thought or emotion we experience and every belief that we hold ripples through our bodies, affecting our immune systems, our brains and our hormonal networks.

I hope this summary of some of the most recent and exciting research on the effect of the mind on the body has been of help to you in exploring and understanding Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT). Many books have been written about the method and there are several educational Web sites devoted to the subject. If you would like more in-depth information, please see my [Recommended Resources](#) page.