

Surprising Stress Research



And How EFT Can Save Your Health

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It was the middle of the night and there was no way I was going to get back to sleep. It felt like the stress was never going to end. My family was in a situation where we got nothing but bad news, blow after blow, extreme uncertainty that went on and on. A constant threat hung over us.

I've heard that one of the most stressful situations for human beings is not-knowing. We were held in the limbo of not knowing the outcome of our situation for over two years. I remember a few of the worst times lying in bed at night feeling the fear down to the bottoms of my feet...

Have you ever felt like your stress was off the scale? Most of us have been through some period or another of great stress. Not only is it a painful and uncomfortable place to be, but stress takes a terrible toll on our bodies. It has been estimated by the American Academy of Family Physicians that at least 2/3 of doctor visits are for stress-related problems. As anyone who has had a debilitating illness will tell you, your health is the bottom line. Without your health, everything else that matters to you is in jeopardy. And nothing endangers our health like stress. Now that's a stressful thought.

Due to that recent challenging time in my own life, I have found myself more interested than ever in understanding our brain and body's responses to stressful situations. What does stress do to the body and the mind? What



is the body-mind connection, in other words, how much do our thoughts, beliefs, and emotions affect the body's innate fight-or-flight reactions? And how can we handle life's inevitable stresses by bringing our most conscious and helpful responses to these challenges? Are we really victims of stress or can we be co-creators of health in spite of stress?

This report is intended to share with you some exciting new information about stress and our health. I've been very grateful that I didn't get sick during that very stressful time I went through, and I know EFT and body-mind awareness helped a lot. This new research surprised me and gave me much more confidence that we do have the power to stay healthy even when life throws us curve balls. Now that it's all over (and thankfully all is well now for my family), I want to share some of the exciting key concepts that give me hope that we can survive and even thrive through very stressful times.

As it turns out, the two healing tools I use in my CreativeEFT practice, hypnotherapy and EFT, are completely compatible with the latest scientific discoveries regarding stress and how to mitigate its effects on our health. Your Transforming Stress Toolkit includes worksheets and recordings based on this information to help you cultivate health and wellness despite the hugely stressful environment that is often modern-day life. (I do assume some familiarity with EFT - if you are not familiar with the tapping technique, please see the How To Do EFT page at www.CreativeEFT.com.)



Stress and the Mind-Body Connection

We are all aware of stress reduction techniques. Meditation, yoga, exercise and of course EFT have all been shown to reduce stress in the body. We are especially lucky to have the “stress First Aid” of EFT. You can tap for a few minutes and feel yourself calming down. Research has proven the following:

- EFT reduces the stress hormone cortisol
- The amygdala (the emotional brain, source of the fight-or-flight response) receives calming signals when we tap
- EFT alters brain wave patterns and restores balance

You can find more about this research on David Feinstein’s excellent website, www.innersource.net/ep/

When we are in the state of anxiety and stress (sympathetic nervous system), the restorative and reparative functions of the body are literally shut down. Shifting to more relaxed states (parasympathetic nervous system) activates our immune system, allows the cells to repair, and mobilizes the body’s healing responses. Tapping is great for this and regular EFT can really help us restore balance to our bodies and minds.

But what about the times when there’s just a lot of stress and no way out of it for a while? Are the above practices enough? Sometimes we simply can’t



reduce the stress in our lives, as much as we would like to. Are we doomed to be at risk for stress-related health issues despite our best efforts? Is there anything more we can do?

 **Recent research is adding something new** 
at least these findings were a surprise to me.

**This has to do with the immense effect
of thoughts and beliefs
*on the body.***

What You Believe Makes A Huge Difference - And It Is Physical

A 2013 TED Talk by Kelly McGonigal, PhD really got my attention. She is a health researcher who now confesses that much of what she has taught about stress in the last decade has been WRONG! What could she be talking about?

The idea had always been that stress is bad for our health. Stress is the enemy and we need to reduce stress, which is sometimes not possible. But new research is showing that stress can be less harmful and even good for us depending on what we *believe* about it. Our beliefs make a physical difference! The harmful physical stress reactions happening in the body (elevated blood pressure, release of cortisol and adrenaline, the whole cascade of detrimental physical effects of stress) can be changed by



something as simple as what a person *believes* about the stress. And when that change is made, the stress effects may even become positive and helpful to the body and brain.

I immediately had to find the studies that Dr. McGonigal referred to (you can find the links at the end of this report). One experiment, included in a paper published by Harvard's Department of Psychology, focused on a group of students who were studying to take the GRE, a highly stressful situation. They were invited to participate in a practice GRE test. Half of the subjects were told that they could expect certain physiological reactions, such as rapid heartbeat, constricted breathing, jittery feelings -- but that these were GOOD signs because they were a predictor of greater success. The stress symptoms meant that their brains were gearing up to do the best job possible.

As a result, these students actually performed better than those who were not given any information. Apparently the students who were given this positive expectation did not *freak out* when the nervous energy flowed through them but instead felt reassured by the *power surge* they were experiencing, which helped them perform better. And the results were lasting. They actually scored better than the control group on the actual GRE test some weeks later.

I found this utterly fascinating because it corresponds to a concept we frequently use in hypnotherapy and EFT called *reframing*. The story we tell



ourselves about any situation has everything to do with how we feel about the situation. My favorite way to reframe is to use the words, “the truth is...” If I had been preparing a client for a GRE test, we might have tapped like this: *“Even though I’m nervous about the test, I deeply accept myself and the truth is, I have a good brain... I have prepared for this test... I know everything I need to know to be successful...”* And that would have helped.

However, now that I have the information from this study, we could make the tapping even more effective: *“Even though I’m nervous about the test, I still accept myself, and **the truth is, these nervous feelings are a good sign!** Everything I’m feeling, heart beating fast, breath short, **this shows that my brain is powering up to do the best it can.** I appreciate the way my body is preparing me to rise to the occasion and do a great job!”*

Your Beliefs Change Your Physical Body’s Stress Response

The study above includes a flow chart that I am still thinking about (to view the chart, see the link in my notes). It shows the measurable physical effects of stress in the two groups. As the stressful situation is introduced (the GRE practice test), the same physiological stress occurs in the bodies of both groups. But then the charts diverge.

For Group A, the normal stressful thoughts and beliefs continue (“oh no, what if I fail? I don’t know if I can do this! I hate tests!” etc.) and the physiological stress mounts (constricted blood vessels, higher blood pressure, more cortisol and adrenaline, muscle tension). The fight-or-flight



response is underway and people feel threatened, hyper-vigilant, insecure, anxious. Their ability to stay focused, calm, rational and high-functioning is impaired.

Haven't we all experienced some form of test anxiety and the "brain freeze" that it causes? It is no fun to draw a blank and not be able to show what you know, and that happens due to the full-blown stress responses of test anxiety. The researcher calls these "maladaptive physiological responses" because they actually impair your ability to function well (unless what you need to do is fight or flee.)

For Group B, their new *belief* about the stress symptoms kicks in as soon as they feel the adrenaline coursing through their bodies. They have been told that this is a good sign, that it is performance-enhancing. When they interpret it this way, immediately their body chemistry changes from that of the other group. Instead of escalating into intense fight-or-flight and debilitating anxiety, their bodies show improved cardiac efficiency, good tone in the muscles and blood vessels, absence of hyper-vigilance, better blood flow to the brain -- and enhanced focus and performance.

Note that this does not mean the students are in relaxation and are not experiencing stress. On the contrary, the stress response continues but it has been transformed -- their belief has allowed their bodies to change the energy of stress into "adaptive physiological responses" (the researcher's words) which actually sharpen the students' focus, help them think clearly,



and enhance their performance. Especially remarkable is the transformation of the effects of stress on the heart. In both cases, the heart beats faster and stronger, but in Group A, the blood vessels constrict which equals high blood pressure and possible cardio-vascular damage -- whereas in Group B, the blood vessels relax and open to the increased flow of oxygen-rich blood. Their entire system is, very literally, empowered for optimal performance both mentally and physically. Dr. McGonigal reports that this physiology matches the surge that we see in *courage* and, amazingly, in states of *joy*.

Reframing Affects Our Health

How exciting to think that the reframing that is so often a part of EFT could literally change our body chemistry in a stressful situation and shift us into courage and even a trace of joy. Then we will be at our best, think clearly, and be able to do whatever we need to do. A simple change in belief can take us in the direction of health and high functioning rather than illness and impaired functioning. It is fascinating to think that a momentary intervention of *changing your belief* about the stress you feel could make so much difference. Physical difference. The story you tell yourself about the stress determines whether that stress intensifies and hurts your body or stabilizes and enhances your ability to function.

This Information Could Save Your Life

So our beliefs make a huge difference in how stress acts in our bodies. What are the results on a person's health over time? Some remarkable



studies on stress and mortality have shown that a person's *beliefs about stress* have an enormous impact on whether people under stress will remain healthy or not. An eight-year study on mortality done at the University of Wisconsin-Madison looked at the correlation between high stress and the belief that stress was harmful. It found that people who reported a high degree of stress *along with a strong belief that the stress was hurting their health* had a **43% greater change of dying prematurely**. What a striking statistic. *Those who reported high stress but did not hold that belief showed no greater risk of premature death*. It is becoming clear that our beliefs may literally be either life-threatening or life-saving.

The Science Backs Up What Mind-Body People Have Known

When I first took training in hypnotherapy in 1996, I had an "aha" moment. We learned an important principle of hypnotherapy: *"the subconscious mind does not know the difference between imagination and reality."* For instance, this is the basis for the powerful imagery technique of "future pacing:" in hypnosis, you vividly imagine your future self with the desired changes already in place, and your subconscious begins to accept this imagined scene as real. You begin to identify with it and feel more comfortable and confident. And as you have more positive feelings about this new self-image, you naturally begin to embody this new vision.

I kept thinking, how simple; if our mind is this powerful, why don't we create future visions all the time? Then it dawned on me -- we do. But we do it in a negative way and it has a name: *worry*. I then began to wonder



about the effects of vividly imagining those worst-case scenarios (and we are all so good at that). If the subconscious does not know the difference between imagination and reality... could we be emotionally living these stressful imaginary futures (our worries) as if they are real?

Yes indeed. We can and we do. As Mark Twain said, "I've been through some terrible things in my life, some of which actually happened." My "aha" moment was this: *what if every thought that I cultivate is a form of self-hypnosis? What if I am hypnotizing myself all the time? And how often do I hypnotize myself into stressful states simply by worrying?*

The science is now showing us how physically real this is. Physiological changes happen due to the beliefs, thoughts and images in our minds. We can trigger the stress response, with its whole cascade of stress chemicals and physical symptoms, with our thoughts and our imagination. And when there are external stressors, it is primarily *our thoughts and beliefs about the stress* that will determine how far it will go and how detrimental it will be to our health.

And so, one of the most important health practices we can have is to be mindful of our thoughts and responsible for them.

On a moment by moment basis, we have a choice as to what direction our mind is going and whether this is helpful or harmful. We need to stop saying and thinking, "this stress is killing me" or "this job is going to be the



death of me.” Those are literally dangerous thoughts. I believe that EFT can be powerfully effective to shift our thoughts and beliefs and body chemistry (see the worksheets).

We All Need Somebody to Lean On

One more fascinating thing I learned about stress from Dr. McGonigal’s talk is that oxytocin is a stress hormone. Really? I thought oxytocin was the feel-good hormone associated with loved ones cuddling, mothers nursing babies, and anyone getting and giving hugs. Surprisingly, oxytocin levels are elevated in our system during times of great stress, which may mean that we are chemically hard-wired to seek social support in difficult times. As one researcher put it, the increased oxytocin in their system may “lead people to seek out more and better social contacts” when under stress.

It has been shown that social support reduces the stress chemicals in our system and the feel-good oxytocin soothes our bodies. In addition, oxytocin literally heals the physical harm of stress. This chemical helps our heart cells heal and regenerate from stress-induced damage. What if one powerful antidote to the harmful effects of stress is a hug? Researchers have found that one good hug can elevate your oxytocin levels for an hour!

Another study showed that if you go beyond just receiving social support and actually find a way to *give back and help others*, you may neutralize your risk of stress-related mortality. There was increased mortality among those undergoing stress who had not tangibly helped others -- but *no increase*



among those who had provided help. Being a helper, especially in the midst of great stress, has a “stress-buffering effect” (researcher’s words).

This made me think of one of my daughter’s favorite quotes. She shared it with me in the aftermath of 9/11. It comes from Mr. Rogers. He said that when he would see scary things on the news, his mother would always say to him “Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping.”

“To this day, especially in times of disaster, I remember my mother's words, and I am always comforted by realizing that there are still so many helpers — so many caring people in this world.” (Mr. Rogers, quoted on the PBS website)

It is beautiful to think that when we respond to crisis by becoming one of the helpers, we not only soothe the stress of others but benefit by becoming more stress-resilient ourselves.

Summary of the Surprising Findings

- What we believe about stress has physical effects on how the stress operates in our bodies.
- If we believe stress is hurting us, it is more likely to cause physical harm.



- If we hold the belief that we can stay healthy anyway, and even that the stress is making us stronger and better, it is more likely that we will stay healthy.
- As soon as we feel the stress in our body and mind, if we immediately give ourselves encouraging thoughts (“great, my body is preparing me for the challenge”), the physical stress does not reach toxic levels and it can even enhance our ability to function at our best
- We need to be aware of negative thoughts and beliefs which, if given free rein, will increase stress chemicals in our bodies
- Reaching out to others during stressful times helps us stay healthy
- If we help others, we become especially stress-resilient

Back To My Story

Due to the confidentiality of family members, I am unable to go into detail about our situation, but suffice to say that we experienced great professional and financial insecurity for a prolonged period of over two years. There was a constant sense of threat hanging over us and we lived with great uncertainty. Days, weeks, months of not-knowing. And feeling powerless in the situation. It finally took legal action to set things right and, after many delays, everything was eventually resolved. It all worked out to



our benefit in the end, but what a rough and scary ride it was. Like a detour out of my life and into the Twilight Zone.

I have been so grateful to have stayed healthy during and after that crazy time, and I have thought a lot about it. Despite the severe stress, I wasn't sick a day. Like anyone, I had my freak-out moments, my dark times, my moments of forgetting everything I know. But I must have done something right too. Here's what I think helped...

- **Tapping! A lot of tapping**
- **Looking for the good - daily gratitude for good things**
- **Believing we would be okay**
- **Affirming what was really important**
- **Giving my body encouraging messages - believing in its health**
- **Meditation and hypnosis**
- **Exercise and being out in Nature**
- **Having great support from wonderful friends and family**
- **Being in a helping profession**
- **A spiritual orientation - believing in life and goodness; believing in something greater and ultimate meaning and purpose**

Amazingly, these correspond quite well to the new research, which I didn't know about at the time. Thanks to hypnotherapy and EFT, I was highly aware of the mind-body connection and did my best with what I knew. I was determined that the stress would not make me sick! I remember well doing a lot of tapping with phrases like these:



Even though I'm filled with anxiety, I deeply accept myself, and I have a strong and healthy body.... I appreciate my body and my powerful immune system.

Even though I don't know what will happen and that's really stressful, I deeply accept myself... and the truth is, everything that is important is safe and secure -- we have a good family and we're really here for each other.

Even though there is so much stress, I believe in my health. I appreciate my body. It's doing a great job to carry me through this.

Even though I'm feeling so much fear about _____, we're doing the best we can with what we have -- the love in our family is stronger than all of this

Even though I feel panic about _____, the truth is, that is just my nervous system doing what it's programmed to do to protect me.

Even though it feels like this will never end, I deeply accept myself... and I'm so grateful for my wonderful friends and family who are there for me. We will get through this.

The belief that I didn't have to get sick was something I "tapped in" over and over. Tapping, also hypnosis and meditation, going to a peaceful place within... still, it was hard. I did not always feel immediate relief from the tapping. Sometimes I was quaking in my boots while imagining my peaceful place! And yet I never was sick a day.



If I had known about the new research, I could have added:

Even though I feel the anxiety, the stress, the truth is, these are signals from my body and brain that they are preparing me to do my best today. I'll be able to do whatever is needed.

I do think that happened. When the time came for me to take some significant action, I rose to the occasion and did things I never thought I could do. I took action and was effective in ways I never dreamed of, which helped a great deal to resolve our situation. I think the energy of stress really was channeled into strength, clarity, and great effectiveness.

It will take some new ways of thinking to “make stress our friend,” as Dr. McGonigal suggests. But everything we learn, especially when combined with EFT and mindfulness, can help us stay as healthy as possible when life does throw those curve balls.



Using EFT To Transform the Stress in Your Body

I hope you've been getting some ideas of how to rethink the stresses in your life. What you think and believe really does matter. And when you bring tapping into the picture, then you have greatly increased power to help the mind and body get on track and be moving in the right direction.



If you're new to EFT, it is easy to learn the basic process. The "How To Do EFT" page on my website, www.CreativeEFT.com, provides brief videos and handouts and explains what to do.

Using the Transforming Stress Toolkit

The tools I'm offering you are best if used over time. Simple tapping in the moment is always great, but when you have time, try using the resources I have provided: four EFT worksheets, a handout, and two mp3 recordings.

The Worksheets

Just sit down and take the time to go through one or more worksheets for a stressful situation in your life. You will find a wealth of ideas on how to tap. As you apply the tapping from these many different angles, you are neutralizing the ways the stress has triggered you. And your body will benefit greatly from all the tapping. Soon these healthier responses to stress will become habits because you will have absorbed these ways of thinking, creating new pathways in the brain.

The Tapping/Hypnosis Recordings on MP3

Often we are too stressed and busy to carve out time for ourselves. And that is when we need it the most. These recordings are heart-felt, offered as a gift to you. So take the time to listen. Let yourself be guided by my supportive voice on both recordings. Let the recording do the work for you. As you tap along with the EFT process or lie back to enjoy some deep relaxation with the hypnosis process, you will experience a change in your



brain waves and body chemistry that is very healing for your system. The subconscious learns by repetition - try using recordings over time. They will become your friends.

Transforming Your Stress To Save Your Health

I hope I have been able to convey my new realization of the immense power that our thoughts and beliefs have in determining our bodies' response to stress. We may not be able to transform the outer stresses -- often, we can't change what is happening around us - but we can immediately tend to our inner reactions and transform the effects of stress in our bodies. And the more we do, especially if we add EFT, the healthier and more stress-resilient we become.

The Importance of Getting Help

Tapping is often presented as a self-help method and it is the most effective one I know. However, I don't believe we are meant to do all our healing alone. Never underestimate the value of seeking help. There are many excellent EFT practitioners who offer their work by phone/Skype. Please contact me if you would like to find out how my EFT sessions can help you move through your own issues and transform your stress into health, well-being and emotional freedom. You can reach me at bettymh.vt@gmail.com or by calling [802-881-1255](tel:802-881-1255).



One Final Note

This final note is an important one. As Dr. Lissa Rankin makes very clear in her book, *Mind Over Medicine*, sometimes when we get sick, our bodies are speaking to us. If our stressful situation is chronic and truly toxic, such as an impossible job or a destructive relationship, all the tapping and reframing in the world may not keep us healthy. Then it's time to really listen to the body and admit that something is majorly wrong in our lives. Something is not working. And then we may need the courage to get out of denial and make big changes.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

Please do watch Dr. Kelly McGonigal's excellent 15-minute TED talk:

<http://kellymcgonigal.com/2013/12/31/watch-my-ted-talk-how-to-make-stress-your-friend/>

Stress as America's number one health problem:

<http://www.stress.org/americas-1-health-problem/>

Dr David Feinstein's report on the current research supporting EFT: [http://](http://www.innersource.net/ep/images/stories/downloads/)

www.innersource.net/ep/images/stories/downloads/

[Acupoint Stimulation Research Review.pdf](http://www.innersource.net/ep/images/stories/downloads/Acupoint%20Stimulation%20Research%20Review.pdf)

Dr. Joaquin Andrade's study involving brain wave patterns and EFT:

<http://www.innersource.net/ep/articlespublished/neurological-foundations.html>



“Improving Acute Stress Responses: The Power of Reappraisal” (this report contains the GRE study and the flow chart)

http://wendyberrymendes.com/cms/uploads/CDPS_reappraisal-1.pdf

“Does the perception that stress affects health matter? The association with health and mortality” <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/22201278>

“Feeling stressed? Oxytocin could help you reach out to others for support.”

<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/06/130625092003.htm>

“Giving to others and the association between stress and mortality”

<http://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/full/10.2105/AJPH.2012.300876>

And do explore Dr. Lissa Rankin’s insightful book, *Mind Over Medicine*. She tells the story of how sick she was until she realized that most of her health conditions were stress-related -- and how she had to courage to listen to her body and make major life changes. The result was that she healed herself. Lissa is also a proponent of EFT. In addition, you will find in her book the best presentation I know of the amazing phenomenon we call the placebo effect, which is really about the astonishing power that beliefs can have to create physical changes in the body. <http://mindovermedicinebook.com>.

