

# Evaluation of a Meridian-Based Intervention, Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), for Reducing Specific Phobias of Small Animals

Wells, S., Polglase, K., Andrews, H. B., Carrington, P. & Baker, A. H. (2003). Evaluation of a meridian-based intervention, emotional freedom techniques (EFT), for reducing specific phobias of small animals. *Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 59:9, 943-966.

## Abstract

This study explored whether a meridian-based procedure, Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT), can reduce specific phobias of small animals under laboratory-controlled conditions. Randomly assigned participants were treated individually for 30 minutes with EFT (n = 18) or a comparison condition, Diaphragmatic Breathing (DB) (n = 17). ANOVAS revealed that EFT produced significantly greater improvement than did DB behaviorally and on three self-report measures, but not on pulse rate. The greater improvement for EFT was maintained, and possibly enhanced, at 6 - 9 months follow-up on the behavioral measure. These findings suggest that a single treatment session using EFT to reduce specific phobias can produce valid behavioral and subjective effects. Some limitations of the study are also noted and clarifying research suggested.

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## Introduction by Patricia Carrington, PhD

**Please note:** In addition to Dr. Carrington's article, a complete preprint of the study is available at <http://www.eftdownunder.com/research.html> .

Irrational fears of specific objects or situations such as insects, snakes, small animals, elevators, bridges, tunnels, or others, are among the most widespread fears reported according to surveys of the general population. Addressing this important category of fears, Steve Wells and his associates in Australia conducted a ground breaking study on the use of EFT for the treatment of specific phobias of small animals and insects which will be the first controlled study of a meridianbased intervention ever to be published in a leading peer reviewed journal.

To appreciate the importance of this you need to know that while the energy psychology methods, of which EFT is in the forefront, have the potential of revolutionizing the way that psychotherapy is practiced worldwide, in addition to their use for medical and educational purposes, there is one major difficulty in the way of this (besides the problem of acceptance by the Old Guard which is always present). This is the fact that we have as

yet no systematic body of research in this area to cite as a basis for further studies when applying for grants or submitting to journals, or for achieving acceptance within our society's institutions. Without this we can be stopped in our tracks before we can really get moving.

The Wells et al. study therefore opens a door to serious research in energy psychology that was hitherto closed and represents, in this sense, a landmark. It will, of course, need to be followed by more extensive research to have a significant impact on the scientific community, but as an opening wedge, it is of historical importance.

For this reason I am proud to have taken part in the preparation and writing of the journal article reporting the Wells study, the final version of which is to be published in the Journal of Clinical Psychology. It was a long and at times difficult journey, but one well worth having taken.

The Wells et al. research is formally summarized in the abstract below. In essence, Steve Wells and his team in Australia studied the effect of EFT on phobias of small animals and insects by comparing it with the effect of a deep breathing technique on the same phobias. The deep breathing method used identical reminder phrases and the other portions of the protocol used in EFT the only major difference between the two techniques as they were used here being that during EFT the participants tapped on acupoints, and in the comparison condition they used deep diaphragmatic breathing. This was an excellent research design because almost all factors in the two conditions were held equal, including participant expectations. As a result, the salient feature which differentiated the two conditions was that one involved EFT tapping and the other didn't.

What did Steve and his colleagues actually find? First, and not surprisingly, they discovered that deep breathing is in itself apparently quite beneficial for the treatment of such phobias, a fact which made it difficult for EFT to come out better in this test (think how easy it would have been to show EFT's superiority if, say, the comparison group had watched a videotape on relaxation instead) Despite this obvious handicap, however, EFT came out way ahead on 4 of the 5 measures used (both treatments produced similar results in pulse rate).

While each of the groups improved significantly following their respective "treatments" the EFT participants improved significantly MORE than did the deep breathing group on the 4 subjective and behavioral measures. What is more, on the crucial behavioral test (measuring how close the person dared to walk toward their feared animal before, and then after whichever treatment they were given) the EFT participants held their gains far better than did the deep breathing subjects when the groups were re-assessed 6 to 9 months after they had learned their technique. In other words, the findings suggest that those people who act less fearful right after learning EFT, with respect to a feared object, continue to act less fearful of that animal even after a long passage of time during which they have not used EFT. In other words the effects of EFT last.

Below is the formal description of this study. The details must wait until you read the actual paper which will be published in September or October of this year. Only then will you be able to appreciate the meticulous care that went into this study.

With warmest wishes,

Patricia Carrington, Ph.D.