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Brain scans show 'tapping' combats food cravings

Early findings from a world-first study aimed at scientifically proving a simple 'tapping' technique have shown the method is effective in reducing food cravings.

Bond University Clinical Psychologist, Associate Professor Peta Stapleton led the research into Emotional Freedom Techniques (EFT) or 'tapping', which is used to treat a number of conditions including chronic pain, obesity, anxiety and stress.

The complete results of Dr Stapleton's pilot program will be revealed at the upcoming Mind Heart Connect Conference on the Gold Coast next month (May), with preliminary results showing a significant reduction in activity in the emotional centre of the brain, responsible for food cravings.

EFT – also known as psychological acupuncture – involves using two fingers to rapidly tap on specific acupressure points on the face or body, while focusing on a specific problem or issue. The technique is designed to target the neural pathways of the brain.

Dr Stapleton is a world leader in the emerging therapy approach of EFT. She said the new Bond University research involved brain scans being taken at the beginning and end of a four-week tapping program.

“There has been a lot of research, and as a result there is a lot of evidence, on the changes in human behaviour and observable improvements that EFT can have on people with conditions like obesity – namely weight loss, reduced food cravings and weight management,” said Dr Stapleton.

“However, this is the first time anywhere in the world that Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging scans (fMRI) have been used to see physical, scientific evidence of exactly how EFT self-help techniques work on these conditions by changing the brain’s neural pathways involved in addiction and food cravings.”

The Bond University-led pilot program was run in conjunction with a research team at the Gold Coast Surgical Hospital at Varsity Lakes, using the Hospital’s cutting-edge fMRI equipment.

Fifteen obese adult patients participated in the ground-breaking research. The participants were taught tapping techniques, which they self-administered at regular intervals throughout the program.

Dr Stapleton said the scans, which were taken while the participants were looking at photos of food, showed their brain activation.

“After four weeks of EFT we expected to see those parts of the brain that usually activate their cravings and hunger in response to certain foods would no longer do so, and this has certainly been the case,” she said.

“The brain’s neural pathways ‘rewire’ and their desire for those foods diminishes.”

Dr Stapleton said she hoped the results of the research would add an additional layer of evidence-based, scientific proof to support the effectiveness of EFT and increase its uptake by psychologists and other allied health professionals.

Five themed ‘tapping’ master-classes will be conducted at The Mind Heart Connect Conference, focusing on techniques for parents, children and education; weight loss and food cravings; trauma and PTSD; peak performance; and abundance and wealth creation.

The Conference, was held on May 5-7, bringing together the world’s leading researchers and practitioners to showcase EFT in a series of presentations and workshops for both allied health professionals and members of the general public.

(Source: [Bond University](#))