

BIOFEEDBACK AS AN EFFECTIVE Stress Management Tool

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Biofeedback is a tool and process that can be used to manage stress and other ailments. Biofeedback information is gathered using specialized instruments that measure one or more physiological markers including muscle tone, breathing rate, heart rate, blood pressure, brainwaves, skin temperature, and sweat production.

We experience biofeedback all of the time. For instance, when you watch a scary movie, your hands might become sweaty and your heart rate increases. If you move your attention away from the movie and think about something pleasant, these physical responses diminish. This is a simple, but valid, example of biofeedback.

Biofeedback provides more precise measurements of these stress-related phenomena. **You can literally measure your stress and the effectiveness of stress-reduction techniques.** The best ways for you to manage stress will be different from those of someone else. Biofeedback is really a teaching tool.

There are different types of biofeedback devices available:

1. **Clinical.** These devices are generally only available to professionals and require training to use properly. It can be useful to receive biofeedback therapy if you have the time and financial resources to do so.

- **The ability to alter your physiological responses is a skill that a trained biofeedback expert can help you to learn.**

2. **Home interactive computer programs.** There are sensors that can be plugged into your computer or mobile device. These sensors often attach to your finger

or ear or are worn like a headband. The software often provides verbal prompts or other instructions to help you relax and provides feedback regarding the results.

3. **Wearable.** These are more mobile and less intrusive to use. They often consist of a watch-type device or sensor that goes around your waist. They can provide alerts if your stress levels are above an acceptable level.

You have more control than you think over your stress response:

1. **Breathing.** Slow and relaxed breathing can reduce the severity of stress quite significantly. What is the best way for you to breathe to reduce your stress response? That's what a biofeedback device can help you to discover.
2. **Muscle relaxation.** Relaxing your muscles can also reduce the amount of stress you feel. Which muscles are most effective to relax? What is the best way to relax them?
3. **Your thoughts.** Your thoughts can create stress or peace. It just depends on the thoughts and you. Maybe thinking about the beach is more effective for reducing stress than thinking about puppies. Biofeedback can show you.

Biofeedback devices allow you to measure your stress in a variety of ways. This also allows you to see which techniques work the best for decreasing your stress. You can systematically determine which breathing techniques work for you. You can figure out which muscles you need to relax and the best way to relax them. Which thoughts are the most calming for you? Biofeedback can teach you.

Biofeedback is a non-invasive way of dealing with stress that doesn't require medication. It requires some equipment and a willingness to practice. **In time, you can develop the ability to alter your pulse, blood pressure, muscle tension, sweat**

production, and other symptoms associated with stress.

Learning to relax yourself is a skill that takes practice. Biofeedback provides feedback on the effectiveness of your biofeedback efforts. As you practice the best techniques for you, you'll become more skilled at applying them. Your biofeedback device can show you how well you're doing.

Most home biofeedback devices have not been reviewed by the FDA, but a few have. Do some research before purchasing a device. Remember that it can also be helpful to see a biofeedback clinician to get the ball rolling.

Although it takes some practice to make biofeedback work for you most effectively, you'll see that it's definitely worth the time and effort as your stress melts away.