

What is Biofeedback?

Biofeedback is a training technique in which people are taught to improve their health and performance by using signals from their own bodies. It is scientifically based and validated by studies and clinical practice.

The word "biofeedback" was coined in the late 1960s to describe laboratory procedures (developed in the 1940's) that trained research subjects to alter brain activity, blood pressure, muscle tension, heart rate and other bodily functions that are not normally controlled voluntarily. Biofeedback is a training technique in which people are taught to improve their health and performance by using signals from their own bodies.

One commonly used device, for example, picks up electrical signals from the muscles and translates the signals into a form that people can detect. This device triggers a flashing light or activates a beeper every time muscles become more tense. If one wants to relax tense muscles, one must try to slow down the flashing or beeping. People learn to associate sensations from the muscle with actual levels of tension and develop a new, healthy habit of keeping muscles only as tense as is necessary for as long as necessary. After treatment, individuals are then able to repeat this response at will without being attached to the sensors.

Other biological functions which are commonly measured and used in similar way to help people learn to control their physical functioning are skin temperature, heart rate, sweat gland activity, and brainwave activity.

Clinicians rely on complicated biofeedback machines in somewhat the same way that you rely on your scale or thermometer. Their machines can detect a person's internal bodily functions with far greater sensitivity and precision than a person can alone. This information may be valuable. Both patients and therapists use it to gauge and direct the progress of treatment.

Although most people initially viewed these practices with skepticism, researchers proved that many individuals could alter their involuntary responses by being "fed back" information either visually or audibly about what was occurring in their bodies.

In addition, studies have shown that we have more control over so-called involuntary bodily functions than we once thought possible. As a result, biofeedback can train individuals with techniques for living a healthier life overall - whether one is afflicted with a medical condition or not.