

Biofeedback for Urinary Incontinence

What Is Biofeedback?

Biofeedback is a technique used to help you learn how to control certain body processes. It has been used successfully to correct many medical problems such as chronic pain, headache, stress, and high blood pressure. It is also useful for bladder and bowel problems. In particular, biofeedback can help you learn how to do effective pelvic muscle exercises that strengthen the muscle supports around the bladder, urethra, and rectum. Weak muscles can contribute to stress incontinence and bowel incontinence.

Biofeedback is also used to treat muscle dysfunction. When muscles are weak or damaged, it can be difficult to know whether the appropriate muscles are being exercised and whether they are being exercised with the proper technique.

How Does Biofeedback Work?

Biofeedback involves the use of special electronic or electrical equipment to display information about certain bodily processes. These body signals are transmitted by small sensors to a unit that creates a picture image on a screen. The visual image on the screen then serves as a way to mentally connect with the way that your behavior can change the signal. The visual image may be color bars or a polygraph display (like an EKG tracing). This information communicates the muscle strength, endurance, and function.

Doctors use biofeedback to instruct and coach patients in the best ways to improve their muscle function. This may hasten the progress that you make in a pelvic muscle re-training program.

***How Does
Biofeedback
Work?
continued***

Because you learn the most effective techniques right away, you can concentrate on the strengthening exercises. Also, the techniques you learn during the biofeedback treatment sessions can be repeated during home practice sessions.

Without biofeedback, some people with weak or damaged muscles have more difficulty identifying the pelvic muscles and exercising them to their full capacity.

***How Is
It Done?***

The body signals are transmitted by way of an internal or external sensing device. For instance, an internal tampon-like device may be fitted into the vagina or rectum or external patches may be placed in the rectal and abdominal area.

The procedure is safe and non-invasive. None of the devices deliver any electrical current. The primary purpose is to detect and transmit the functioning of the muscle activity so that the person can look at a screen to associate the sensations that are felt during the pelvic muscle exercise with the picture on the screen. This helps the person identify and contract the correct muscles.

Most people are unaware of the pelvic muscles and how they contribute to bladder control. Biofeedback helps you learn how to become more aware of these important muscles and to use them regularly to improve bladder control.

***How Is It Done?
continued***

Biofeedback can offer such benefits as:

- Helping to visualize and identify appropriate muscles
- Helping to focus on exercising the correct muscle groups
- Reinforcing efforts to perform the exercise correctly
- Teaching how to repeat the exercise correctly
- Motivating you to take control of your bladder problem
- Recording progress at each session with computer print-outs

***What Is the
Treatment Plan?***

At each session, the information collected about your pelvic muscle strength, endurance, and function helps your doctor develop different exercise strategies for continued improvement of your muscle function. Everyone will have slightly different treatment plans based on their muscle function. Your treatment plan is developed by you and your doctor together, to determine the most practical and effective approaches for muscle training.

***How Long
Does It Take?***

Biofeedback sessions may take between 15 and 45 minutes, depending upon the goals of the session. Most people find the biofeedback sessions interesting and helpful. Between 2 and 8 biofeedback sessions may be needed for pelvic muscle re-training.

***What Are
Tips for
Self-Care?***

Practice. When practicing pelvic muscle exercises at home, be sure to set aside time when you can concentrate on performing the exercises as done with the biofeedback. Focus on the quality of the contraction — the intensity and duration.

**What Are Tips for
self-Care?
continued**

Use Training Aids. Small, portable home training devices are available for daily use. Check with your doctor about using a home trainer to assist your progress. Home trainers can be helpful when first learning the pelvic muscle exercises.

Follow-up. Attend your follow-up sessions, even if you feel you have not practiced your pelvic muscle exercises enough. Usually, the biofeedback session will reveal improvements in muscle awareness, control, and function, even if strength has not increased. Even when the muscles are exercised a little, there can be some improvements in function. Plus, the biofeedback session will motivate you to continue the exercise program.