

**WATERMAN & ASSOCIATES**  
**PSYCHOLOGICAL & COUNSELLING SERVICES**  
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## **WHAT IS BIOFEEDBACK?**

**Dr. Satya Bellerose, Registered Psychologist**

Most people have heard of biofeedback but don't really know what it involves. Biofeedback started in 1969 and has evolved enormously in the last 35 years. Biofeedback simply means using information from the body to learn to control and change something in the body. A very simple form of biofeedback is a mirror. A mirror may show you that your posture is slumped; you could use that information to straighten and improve your posture. Biofeedback typically gives information about your body that isn't normally available. Biofeedback can treat many types of problems such as headaches, teeth clenching, muscle pain, irritable bowel syndrome, anxiety, insomnia, repetitive strain and chronic stress reactions.

Think for a moment where you put your tension. If you put your stress in the respiratory system, you may hold your breath, breathe rapidly, or take shallow breaths. You may find yourself yawning a lot or taking "catch-up" breaths. This is an extremely common stress response seen in those with anxiety, panic, asthma, or in those who are just overstressed. If you put your stress in your skeletal muscles, you may suffer from chronic muscle pain, repetitive strain injuries, or jaw pain. If you put your stress in the autonomic nervous system, your hands and feet may frequently get cold. This pattern is typical of those with hypertension, migraines and Raynaud's. The autonomic nervous system may also cause you to break out in a sweat and your heart to beat rapidly. Biofeedback gives a window into each of these systems and allows us to see and then change an unhealthy pattern into a healthy pattern.

What happens when you consult a biofeedback specialist? After getting some information from you, the specialist will do a Stress profile. This is a brief 15 minute evaluation which will show your individual stress pattern. You will put a respiration belt around the waist, some muscle sensors on the face, neck or forearm area, a small thermometer on a finger and/or toe, and a sensor on the palm of the hand. Based on the interview and evaluation, an individualized treatment plan is designed for you. Biofeedback is a short-term treatment. Some problems may require only a couple of sessions. More chronic problems may involve 5-12 sessions. Biofeedback also requires some practice at home between sessions.

Biofeedback is safe, non-invasive, self-empowering and a lot of fun. To learn about what problems can be effectively treated with biofeedback or to get further information, go to the Association of Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback at [www.AAPB.org](http://www.AAPB.org). AAPB also recommends that you find a therapist who is BCIA-certified. A BCIA-certified therapist is a health professional who completed the required courses, trained under supervision, passed an exam, adheres to the ethics code and obtains continuing

education credits every year. To find a BCIA-certified therapist in your region, go to [www.bcia.org](http://www.bcia.org)

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