

Biofeedback Clinic:

Frequently Asked Questions

The Biofeedback Clinic uses relaxation and mental imagery (RMI) training techniques. Biofeedback is used during the training to help your child see how the techniques work to control their body's response to pain.



What is biofeedback?

Biofeedback teaches your child to alter their response to stress and pain to improve their health. With practice and time, your child will learn to reduce the:

- Onset of their symptoms
- Level of their pain
- Impact of their pain and other symptoms on daily activities

Does biofeedback only work with certain symptoms?

The primary focus of the Seattle Children's Biofeedback clinic is on treating chronic headaches. There are some children and adolescents with other problems such as frequent abdominal pain, musculoskeletal pain, and Raynaud's phenomenon who may also benefit from this approach.

How does the Biofeedback Clinic work?

The Seattle Children's Biofeedback Clinic treats children and adolescents aged 8 to 21 years. The program uses relaxation and mental imagery (RMI) training techniques. Biofeedback works by helping your child learn to control their body's response to stress and pain.

How do we get into the program?

The Biofeedback program accepts patients who are referred from primary care providers who recommend a biofeedback evaluation for your child's existing diagnosis. All patients referred to the clinic must have had a complete medical exam by their primary care provider within the past year.

To be referred to the Biofeedback Clinic, your child's primary care provider will fill out a New Appointment Request Form. They should fax this along with chart notes and radiographic (x-ray) results to our Scheduling Center at 206-985-3121. Our clinical intake nurses will review the information to determine whether or not the biofeedback program will be a good fit for your child's health concern.

Will my insurance cover services from Children's Biofeedback Clinic?

Some insurance plans cover biofeedback services at Seattle Children's Hospital. Please call your insurance company to find out if biofeedback therapy is covered in your plan. If your insurance plan does not cover biofeedback, you may call a Children's financial counselor for financial assistance at 206-987-2228.

Why do I have to wait so long to get an appointment?

There is a very high demand for our biofeedback services. There are a limited number of healthcare providers in the clinic. We work hard to respond to all requests for biofeedback services in a timely manner.

Can my child continue to see other providers including a medical sub-specialist, primary care provider, or mental health specialist?

Yes. We expect to be able to communicate with all providers treating your child. In order to coordinate your child's care, you or your child will be asked to complete a release of information form so that we can discuss your child's progress with their current providers. Please ask about completing this form at your child's first visit.

How does the biofeedback program work?

The doctor or nurse practitioner will meet with you and your child for their visit for an initial medical intake. The next visit will be with the biofeedback therapist who will meet with your child alone for the first half of the visit. Parents and other family members who are present will be asked to join at the end of the visit to review the exercises and goals that were discussed during the visit. Handouts will be given at each session to refer to at home.

How often will my child be seen?

Your child's progress will guide how often we need to see them. Your child will see the doctor or nurse practitioner 2 to 3 times over the course of the program. Biofeedback therapist appointments are scheduled every 2 to 3 weeks for 1 hour. Your child will have a total of 5 biofeedback sessions.

How long does each visit take?

Doctor or nurse practitioner visit (2 to 3 visits):

- 60 minutes for new patients
- 30 minutes for return patients

Biofeedback Therapist visits (5 sessions):

- 60 minutes for new patients
- 60 minutes for return patients

Can appointments be coordinated?

Visits can be coordinated with the doctor or nurse practitioner and biofeedback therapist as available.

What if I need to reschedule appointments due to schedule conflicts or other changes?

Please call our schedulers at 206-987-5176 to change, cancel or reschedule appointments. Please make every effort to come to the appointment, so that your child's treatment can stay on track.

What can I expect during the visits?

Intake (first doctor or nurse practitioner visit)

During the first visit your child's medical provider will meet with you and your child to review:

- Your child's diagnosis
- The history and pattern of your child's pain
- Your child's functional disability (a long-term activity limitation because of a health problem)
- The factors that worsen or improve your child's symptoms
- The possible stressors that worsen your child's symptoms
- Past and current treatment

Instruction (second doctor or nurse practitioner visit)

The second medical provider visit your child will learn relaxation and mental imagery techniques. This will be near the end of the biofeedback sessions to evaluate the effectiveness of the biofeedback therapy. It is at this time that your child will be discharged from the program or will receive a second referral to continue the program.

Biofeedback Training

- During biofeedback training your child will have monitors attached to them that will watch their muscle tension, skin temperature, respiratory (breathing) rate, hand dryness and heart rate.
- A portable biofeedback machine will be loaned to your child for 2 weeks (if available) at the start of treatment.
- Your child will also learn relaxation and mental imagery techniques.
- All of the techniques must be practiced at home to be effective.
- Training sessions are made to match your child's needs. They will focus on the biofeedback signals that will help your child reach their treatment goals.

Follow-up visits

- At the end of the biofeedback training, your child will be scheduled for a follow-up visit in 2 to 3 months. You will meet with both the doctor or nurse practitioner and biofeedback therapist.

Why do we have to have so many visits?

When learning a new skill, such as a sport or an instrument, practice helps with performance and ability. The same is true for learning the relaxation and mental imagery techniques. When patients are able to see and feel what is going on, it helps them get better faster. We use different activities to work on different muscle groups at each visit. Each visit builds on what was learned in the previous visit.

How are the parents/caregivers included in the program?

Parents and other family members are an important part of their child's progress. You are their support and care system. However, this treatment program primarily depends on your child's motivation. Your child will need your support to practice the techniques taught in the clinic. Please allow your child to have the time and space needed to practice the new techniques they will learn.

How will I learn the exercises and goals for my child?

We encourage your child to do their exercises without being reminded. We want them to take control of their symptoms. Your child will receive handouts to refer to at home. Your child can share these with you. Parents are always invited to share their ideas and concerns.

How can I communicate with my child's provider?

Call our Adolescent Medicine nurses at 206-987-2028 option 4. We do our best to answer questions.

For urgent medical concerns, please call your child's primary provider or specialist. Please do not contact the biofeedback program, providers or therapists by e-mail.

To Learn More

- Adolescent Medicine
206-987-2028
- Your child's
healthcare provider
- www.seattlechildrens.org

Free Interpreter Services

- In the hospital, ask your child's nurse.
- From outside the hospital, call the toll-free Family Interpreting Line 1-866-583-1527. Tell the interpreter the name or extension you need.
- For Deaf and hard of hearing callers 206-987-2280 (TTY).

How will biofeedback affect my child if they are taking medicines?

Biofeedback can help with your child's symptoms, along with their medicine. We ask that you let us know what medicine they are taking at the first visit. Please let us know if your child's medicine dosage changes during the biofeedback program. We may need to talk with their primary care provider or specialist to adjust the amount of medicine they are taking.

How long will it take for my child's symptoms to improve?

If your child consistently uses the techniques learned, improvement of symptoms may be seen from 1 to 6 months. This may vary and depend on many things, such as:

- How committed you and your child are to following the treatment plan
- How often your child practices their biofeedback exercises
- How severe the pain or symptoms are for your child

What if I want my child to do biofeedback, but they don't or won't?

Your child must be willing to do biofeedback in order to improve their health and performance. If your child is not ready at this time, we will gladly see them at a later date.

Can we come back after a year for a refresher course?

Yes. Some patients do come back in 6 months, 9 months or even a couple of years after they have completed the program for a refresher course. You will be asked to schedule a medical provider evaluation with one of our biofeedback clinic physicians or nurse practitioners to re-evaluate your child and work with you to determine the treatment plan.

How will biofeedback help my child in the future?

We teach relaxation skills for their symptoms. We hope they are able to use and practice the skills they learn in other areas of their life.

Can parents receive biofeedback here at Seattle Children's Hospital?

Unfortunately, we are unable to see adults here, as we are only a pediatric hospital. We would be glad to give you a list of biofeedback therapists in your community.