Biofeedback Clinic: Frequently Asked Questions

The Biofeedback Clinic uses relaxation and mental imagery 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 helps your child learn to control their body’s response to stress and pain to improve their health. We use relaxation and mental imagery training techniques. With practice and time, your child will learn to reduce the:

- Start 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 main focus of Seattle Children’s Biofeedback Clinic is treating the symptom for which your child has been referred, for example, chronic headaches. Sometimes patients also see improvements in symptoms other than what they came in for, such as sleeplessness, anxiety or lack of focus.

How does Seattle Children’s Biofeedback Clinic work?
We treat children and adolescents ages 8 to 21. Each patient’s needs may be different, but you can expect these types of clinic visits.

First visit – 45 minutes
You and your child will meet with a doctor or nurse practitioner. During this visit, you will review:

- Your child’s diagnosis
- Medicines your child takes
- 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

**Biofeedback sessions – 60 minutes**

Your child will usually have 6 of these sessions with a biofeedback therapist. They are scheduled every 1 to 3 weeks. The closer together they are, the better patients usually do. Here’s what to expect during sessions:

• **First session:** We will meet with your child alone for the first part of the visit. Parents and other family members who are present will join at the end of the visit to review exercises and goals. In other biofeedback sessions, we may or may not have parents meet with their child and therapist, depending on your child’s needs.
• Your child will have monitors attached to them that will watch their muscle tension, skin temperature, respiratory (breathing) rate, hand dryness and heart rate.
• Your child will also learn relaxation and mental imagery techniques.
• Your child will need to practice the techniques at home for them to help.
• We will match your child’s needs. Sessions focus on biofeedback signals that will help your child reach their treatment goals.
• We will provide handouts and treatment instructions for home.

**Check-in visits – 45 minutes**

Your care team may recommend a check-in visit with a doctor or nurse practitioner after 2, 3, or 4 biofeedback sessions. The team will let you know if you need to schedule a check-in visit. During this visit:

• The provider will evaluate how well biofeedback is working for your child.
• They will review the biofeedback techniques your child uses during sessions.
• Based on the provider’s recommendation, your child will end the biofeedback sessions or continue them.

**Exit visit – 45 minutes**

This visit will be near the end of your biofeedback sessions. We will evaluate how well biofeedback worked for your child. At this time, your child will end the sessions, or the provider will recommend they continue sessions and submit a new referral.

**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 visit before.
How do we get into the clinic?
1. Your child needs to have had a medical exam by their primary care provider within the past year.
2. If your primary care provider or specialist recommends a biofeedback evaluation for your child’s diagnosis, they need to submit a referral.
3. We will review the referral and determine if biofeedback would be a good fit for your child’s diagnosis. If so, you will get a phone call from Scheduling.

Will my insurance cover services?
Some insurance plans cover biofeedback at Seattle Children’s. Call your insurance company to find out if biofeedback therapy is covered. If your plan does not cover it, you can call a Children’s financial counselor to see if you qualify for financial assistance at 206-987-3333.

Why do I have to wait so long to get an appointment?
There is a very high demand for 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.

What if I need to reschedule or cancel?
Call Scheduling at 206-987-2986 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.

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. We always invite you to share your 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, call your child’s primary provider or specialist. Please do not contact the biofeedback program, providers or therapists by email.

How will biofeedback affect my child if they are taking medicines?
Biofeedback can help with your child’s symptoms, along with their medicine. 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 in 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

Can we come back for a refresher course?
Yes. Some patients come back in 6 months, 9 months or a couple of years after they have completed the program for a refresher course. We offer 1 or 2 refresher courses.

• If your child completed 6 biofeedback sessions and their exit visit, OR it has been less than two years since their last session: You can schedule 1 or 2 refresher courses.
• If your child did not complete 6 biofeedback sessions and their exit visit, OR it has been more than 2 years, you will need to schedule an appointment with a doctor or nurse practitioner to re-evaluate your child before scheduling the refresher courses.

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.