

Biofeedback and Electrical Stimulation for Your Pelvic Floor

Biofeedback for Incontinence

What is it?

Biofeedback for the pelvic floor is commonly used by physiotherapists to help retrain weak pelvic floor muscles. It is the ability to see on a computer how well you are able to tighten and relax your pelvic floor muscles.

A slim smooth well lubricated vaginal sensor, similar in shape to a tampon, is inserted into the vagina. Your muscle activity is picked up by 2 metal bands on the sensor and projected onto a computer screen. External sensors could also be used for women unable to tolerate the insertion of a vaginal sensor. No electrical activity or impulses are given to you from the sensors. You will not feel anything from the biofeedback.

How does it work?

Biofeedback gives you a picture of your pelvic floor muscle activity. This helps you to gain control over these muscles.

You will need to buy a vaginal sensor, which is inserted much like a tampon during your treatment session. The sensor is attached to the biofeedback unit and measures the activity in your pelvic floor muscles.

Your physiotherapist will coach you to tighten and relax your pelvic floor muscles. Watching your muscle activity on the computer screen will give you an idea of how much effort you need to put into your home exercises or whether you have too much activity and need to learn to relax the pelvic floor muscles. You will see how well you are doing over time. Biofeedback is very motivating and will encourage you to continue with your exercises.

Electrical Muscle Stimulation for Incontinence

What is it?

Electrical stimulation can help you to locate and use your pelvic floor muscles which control the urine and bowel movement. Weak muscles make a weak squeeze. If your muscles are very weak you might not feel them squeeze when you tighten them. You won't be able to see them squeeze because they are inside. Electrical stimulation will help you to feel the muscles squeezing. When you know what the squeeze feels like, you can begin to exercise and use the muscles. You can then use them more effectively to control the urine or bowel movement.

How does it work

You will need to buy your own sensor. The same sensor can be used for biofeedback. Your physiotherapist will tell you what kind of sensor you will need and where to buy it. For treatment, you will lie comfortably on the bed. The sensor is put into the vagina, much like a tampon. Or if you have a problem with fecal incontinence, loss of stool, you might use a smaller rectal sensor. The cord from the sensor is attached to the muscle stimulation unit.

Your physiotherapist will slowly turn the stimulation on. You will feel a tingling sensation in the rectum or vagina. Next you will feel a gentle squeeze as the pelvic floor muscles tighten. The muscles will be stimulated for a few seconds and then will have a rest. Your physiotherapist will coach you to try to actively tighten your muscles as they are stimulated. Usually a treatment session lasts 10 to 20 minutes. Your physiotherapist will want to give you the electrical muscle stimulation treatment once a week until your muscle function improves. You will also be asked to continue your exercises at home. Your therapist might also suggest that you rent a portable muscle stimulation unit to use at home. She will give you the details for that.

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