



Celeste De Bease, PhD

NEW BRAIN WAVE THERAPY FOR PAIN, PARKINSON'S AND MORE -- THINK UP A CURE FOR YOURSELF WITH NEUROTHERAPY

People with epilepsy, Parkinson's disease, Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) or addictions may be able to learn how to "think themselves better" by altering their brain waves to improve their symptoms. A new form of treatment called *neurotherapy* (also known as neurofeedback) is similar to biofeedback but has a unique focus on controlling brain wave activity rather than skin temperature, heart rate, breathing and muscle tension. (Read more about biofeedback in *Daily Health News*, March 17, 2009.)

My interest was piqued when I read that neurotherapy now is used with a wide scope of health issues, including not only those listed above but also autism, chronic pain, posttraumatic stress disorder, depression and anxiety. I got in touch with medical psychologist and bioneurofeedback therapist Celeste De Bease, PhD, to find out how.

HIGH-TECH MIND-BODY MEDICINE

According to Dr. De Bease, many neurological problems involve disordered brain waves. Neurofeedback helps patients learn to set them right.

The brain produces brain waves at varying electrical frequencies measured in hertz (cycles per second). (Just to compare, I looked up the current for household electricity -- it's 60 Hz here in the US.) Brain wave electrical frequencies include...

* Delta -- 1 to 3 Hz and the slowest of all, is mostly seen during sleep.

* Theta -- 4 to 7 Hz, a state of deep relaxation that can bring bursts of creative insight. It occurs during daydreaming and advanced meditation.

* Alpha -- 8 to 13 Hz, a pleasurable, relaxed state associated with being calm and lucid. It occurs in some forms of meditation and sometimes with dream sleep.

* Beta -- 14 to 30 Hz, is the frequency

produced during normal waking activities, when you are processing information for daily living, problem solving and the like.

* High Beta -- any Beta over 21 Hz, these waves show that the brain is in its racing mode associated with anxiety and tension.

Many patients with neurological problems tend toward either under- or over-arousal of the brain. Neurofeedback teaches methods to gain control by using video display (like a video game) images that correspond to different brain waves. Working with the therapist, people can learn ways to produce faster or slower waves. Even children can do this.

MIND CONTROL?

Dr. De Bease explained that people with ADD or depression, or who suffer from mental fog and lethargic thinking in general, benefit from learning how to speed up their brain waves -- those who need to slow them down to calm over-arousal include people with compulsions, autism, posttraumatic stress disorder, chronic-pain disorders, epilepsy and insomnia. Parkinson's disease patients can benefit from slower brain waves that relax their nervous systems and contribute to better motor functioning.

Neurofeedback technology is continuing to evolve, Dr. De Bease said. Where there used to be just a few approaches, therapists now have many well-researched training protocols to work with, and their techniques become more customized as the science and training are refined. For instance, placement of electrodes varies depending on the issue being addressed -- for people with ADD, Dr. De Bease told me that she places electrodes on the scalp directly above the frontal cortex, which controls the function of paying attention.

PRACTICAL ADVICE

The goal of neurotherapy is to recognize how it feels to operate in the desired brain wave activity range and to then learn how to get there at will. Effective training typically takes 10 or more sessions, depending on the problem. Prices vary by area and may range from \$50 to more than \$100/session. Some health insurance plans cover neurofeedback for some conditions, but usually only after you get a diagnosis and prescription from your doctor.

Dr. De Bease calls neurotherapy "a powerful technique," but cautions that it is crucial to find a Biofeedback Certified Professional (BCP) who is well-trained specifically in this technique, especially in light of the fact that many who call themselves qualified have completed just a weekend training program. Look for a practitioner who is certified by the Biofeedback Certification Institute of America (<http://www.bcia.org/>). This means that, among other credentials, the practitioner has had 25 hours of practice mentored by a BCIA-approved practitioner and 100 patient/client sessions reviewed and approved by BCIA.

Neurofeedback can benefit healthy people, too. Dr. De Bease said she works primarily with medical conditions but knows many therapists who focus on performance enhancement, which includes training athletes, business professionals and even members of the military in the use of neurofeedback. Certainly this is a therapy worth looking into -- it's noninvasive and drug-free, not terribly expensive, and may help with many conditions.

Daily Health News interviewed Celeste De Bease, PhD, medical psychologist and bioneurofeedback therapist, based in Bala Cynwyd, Pennsylvania.

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