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How biofeedback can train your brain to think smarter, faster, better

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You exercise your body in the pursuit of optimal function, but what about your brain? Those looking to get an edge in—and out—of the gym are flexing their minds with neurofeedback. We're not talking Sudoku puzzles here (though they have their benefits), but neurofeedback—the process of hooking up to an electroencephalogram (EEG) in order to “train” your brain.

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What It Is

Sure, it sounds a bit sci-fi, but it may dial down your stress level and help you tap into your potential.

“Neurofeedback [also commonly called biofeedback] is somewhat like putting the brain on an elliptical machine or a stair stepper in order to exercise certain regulatory functions. For example, the brain can get stuck in an anxious state and neurofeedback training enables it to shift into a calmer state for optimal function. Essentially, you're aiding the brain's ability to self-regulate,” neurofeedback specialist Evelyn Shapero, of the Brainfitness Centre in Los Angeles, said.

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The practice has been proven effective for treating serious conditions including depression, PTSD, and ADHD, but in today's tech-driven world many are now seeking it out to alleviate stress.

"If a patient has unreasonable fatigue and insomnia, or unexplained weight gain, I test the adrenals to see if there's a disharmonic pattern to their cortisol production," said Dr. Eva Cwynar, a Beverly Hills endocrinologist, assistant professor of clinical medicine at UCLA, and author of "The Fatigue Solution." "If stress hormones like cortisol are too high or low at the wrong times of the day, or too high throughout the day, it can eventually cause the adrenals to say, 'I quit.' Once that happens, the only thing I've found to help get the body back in balance is neurofeedback."

How It Works

Even though that balance is achieved gradually, rather than as a quick fix, most people note feeling a difference after their first session.

The process, while complex and highly individualized, basically works like this: Non-invasive electrodes are attached to the surface of the scalp to measure brain waves and provide feedback as a specialized software program (often a video game) helps guide the brain into a more desired state through subtle and unconscious corrections until the brain ultimately learns to perform at its best—naturally.

Think of it like a high-tech fitness coach, guiding you through exercises and correcting your form until, eventually, you no longer need any assistance.

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"If the adrenals aren't functioning well, your neurotransmitters can be affected and the imbalance can extrapolate to every other hormone in the body, influencing testosterone, thyroid, insulin levels, and more," Cwynar said. "By recreating balance in the body, neurofeedback helps everything run more smoothly, which is why it helps athletes, too. Your metabolism, your ATP, your mitochondria, everything just functions better."

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About the author: [Q by Equinox](#) is the daily blog of the luxury fitness brand. Check back here weekly for new posts that tap into Q's stable of world-class trainers and experts to keep up with all things health and well-being.