

## BIOFEEDBACK AT HOME



**C**old hands are tense. Warm hands are relaxed. We can tell a lot about a person's emotional state by shaking their hand. We can gauge our own stress level by touching our hand to our face (in indoor room temperature, 69–73° F). Cold hands indicate a predominant Stress Response. Warm hands indicate a predominant Relaxation Response. It is all due to blood flow to the extremities. The hands and feet are at the “end of the line” of our arteries. The built-in Stress Response redirects blood to our brain and musculoskeletal system, in preparation for fight or flight in an emergency or threat.

In prior issues of this magazine, I have presented various Brief Relaxation Techniques that are designed to induce the Relaxation Response and counter the Stress Response. With practice, all Brief Relaxation Techniques will warm the hands. In this issue, I will focus on hand-warming techniques, and describe how hand temperature can be measured easily and accurately.

Temperature Biofeedback has been used since the 1960s. In brief, a temperature-reading device

(thermister) is applied to a finger with tape, and there is a digital readout of the temperature available to oneself. Using an appropriate mental technique, and allowing three to five minutes, the temperature can be raised to 90° or higher. Research shows that learning to raise the hand temperature to 90° or higher is very beneficial to those who suffer

migraine headaches, high

blood pressure, insomnia, chronic pain, and digestive disorders.

First, commercial, clinical Biofeedback machines are sophisticated and expensive. Inexpensive devices are available for private use at home or during breaks at work. A “wired” indoor/outdoor thermometer, available at most hardware stores for under \$20, will suffice. The thermister is taped to a fingertip, and there is a digital readout. Another item, available online, is a Stress Card, or Mood Card that has a color change to show the temperature of the grasping finger. Their price is approximately \$10 for 10 cards. The cards are the same size as a credit card. Mood Rings operate under the same principle.

The first and oldest technique likely to raise hand temperature is Yogic Breathing. It is described as deep, slow, smooth and rhythmic. Two to three minutes of *in-two-three-four, out-two-three-four*, in a comfortable sitting position and eyes closed will likely bring about hand-warming.

The technique “Autogenic Phrases” addresses hand-warming

with slow repetition of the following four phrases, three times each:

- *Arms heavy*
- *Arms warm*
- *Legs heavy*
- *Legs warm*

These phrases are said to oneself silently, very slowly and deliberately.

Simple imagery can be helpful. Imagine yourself on a warm Summer day in a wonderful place that you have been to. Stay there three to five minutes. Alternatively, imagine putting your hands into a basin of bathtub temperature water. Finally, imagine you are sitting at a fireplace, and you are looking at the flames or coals, with your hands at just the right warming distance.

A final method is phrases of Loving-Kindness. Each statement is repeated three times, slowly.

- *May all beings be happy.*
- *May all beings be peaceful.*
- *May all beings be well.*

Finally, use the expression, *Namaste*, which means, “*The essence of me connects with the essence of you!*”

In summary—warming the heart warms the hands!

—*Namaste!*

*Dr. Shapiro is a career clinic physician who has utilized relaxation techniques with many of his patients.*



*His YouTube channel is: “Arnie Shapiro, MD Breathing Easy.” Contact Dr. Shapiro by email at: [alloydshapiro@gmail.com](mailto:alloydshapiro@gmail.com).*