



IS Neurofeedback AN EFFECTIVE TREATMENT for ANXIETY and DEPRESSION?

Very often Anxiety and depression go hand in hand. We call them comorbid. Anxiety in the brain can look different even if the symptoms are the same. Neurofeedback is a very effective way of determining what is causing the anxiety and depression you are feeling as well as treating the cause and alleviating the symptoms.

To best describe anxiety/depression and Neurofeedback, I want to share my anxiety story. I never considered anxiety an issue for me until I went through a stressful life event. I couldn't sleep, I wasn't able to eat or hold anything down, and I experienced my first panic attack (well, what I thought was my first). This was understandable though, as it was an extremely stressful event in my life and I was perfectly normal before this happened. Well, maybe not perfectly normal.

When I started to think about my life, I realized that as far back as I could remember, I had anxiety symptoms. As a child, I remember having little panic attacks when I had to talk in

class, read out loud, or present a project and this went on through grade school, college, and into adulthood. I would shake and have rapid breathing and couldn't focus, concentrate or even hear anything anyone was saying until some time after my presentation or turn talking was over. I had headaches my entire life but those were understandable because I came from an anxious, migraine family not to mention that I suffered from "allergies". My mom had migraines and would have nervous hands, my aunt also suffered from migraines and had the shaky hands. I never called them anxious or considered myself to have anxiety. My headaches were frequent but rarely migraines so I thought I was the lucky one.

I went through school flying below the radar. I would be completely lost in a class because I couldn't raise my hand to ask a question, I would miss school because I couldn't bear to present a project or take a test I wasn't confident I could pass. As I got older, I would stay up later and later as sleep didn't come easily for me. I didn't do well at my first job because I wouldn't talk over the loudspeaker and when I got a job working for a doctor, I was asked to not answer the phone because I sounded too young and nervous.

As I became older, the insomnia was understandable because I had children and you don't sleep a lot when you have kids. As my kids got older, I tried every technique in the book to induce sleep. Nothing worked consistently. I stayed up late working even though I had to be to work early in the morning. I would over-react to criticism, cry at the drop of a hat, and had mood swings like crazy. I didn't feel depressed but most definitely had depression symptoms. I tried medication. Birth control pills helped level me off a little and I took Prozac for a couple months for PMDD symptoms. I didn't like taking medication and it usually only worked for a little bit.

About a month before the stressful event, I was experiencing high blood pressure, not too high, and my cholesterol level didn't warrant medication, but my brain was not relaxed. I took Paxil to try to get some sleep and start eating again. It was effective, but I hated the side effects, so I stopped after 2 months. I thought I was fine. My life went back to normal (my new normal as a single mom). I was less stressed in most areas and more stressed in others. Then a very simple event happened, and my brain was again in full panic mode.

Although I was helping others through Neurofeedback I had not put myself as a priority. Now it was time to do so. By working on myself, I became very in touch with what anxiety and comorbid depression feels like and looks like.

ANXIETY MANIFESTS IN MANY DIFFERENT WAYS SUCH AS:

- excessive worrying
- nagging sense of fear
- restlessness
- overly emotional
- negative thinking
- catastrophizing
- defensiveness
- poor sleep
- irritability
- Lack of concentration
- feeling overwhelmed
- fatigue/exhaustion

DEPRESSION SYMPTOMS CAN VARY FROM MILD TO SEVERE AND CAN INCLUDE:

- Feeling sad or having a depressed mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed
- Changes in appetite — weight loss or gain unrelated to dieting
- Trouble sleeping or sleeping too much
- Loss of energy or increased fatigue
- Increase in purposeless physical activity (e.g., hand-wringing or pacing) or slowed movements and speech (actions observable by others)
- Feeling worthless or guilty
- Difficulty thinking, concentrating or making decisions
- Thoughts of death or suicide

I had most, if not all of these at some point in my life. They may not have all been going on at once, but they were there. I didn't label it, or notice it, or even reach out for help very often for 2 reasons: (1) It was my normal. This is how I had always been and it's not easy to see what's going on with yourself. (2) When I did see that how I was feeling was affecting others in my life, it wasn't easy to talk to doctors about it. If I wasn't completely breaking down, they really didn't understand what was going on with me. The two times I was on medications were not the only times I spoke to a doctor about how I felt. When I was experiencing high blood pressure, I was instructed to lose weight. My emotions or anxiety were never explored or questioned and if my emotions were taking over, I was diagnosed with depression, anxiety was never explored.

The next step was to fix the problem.

WHAT IS NEUROFEEDBACK?

Neurofeedback, also known as EEG biofeedback, has been studied and practiced since the late 60's. Neurofeedback is a type of exercise for your brain. It allows you to see the frequencies produced by different parts of your brain in real-time and then through visual and auditory feedback, teaches the brain to better regulate itself. Neurofeedback can be used to help detect, stimulate, and/or inhibit activity in the brain safely and without medication. It can help restore a wider "range of motion" in brain states, much like stretching or yoga does for the body.

While the client sits comfortably watching a movie or pictures appear on the screen (a calm and focused state), the EEG equipment measures the frequency or speed at which electrical activity moves in the areas where electrodes have been placed. This information is sent to the



therapist's computer. The therapist is then able to determine what frequencies are out of balance. For example, when the EEG shows that you are making too many "slow" or "sleepy" waves (delta/theta) or too many "fast" waves (high beta), the therapist adjusts a reward band to encourage more balanced activity. This encouragement or "reward" happens through visual recognition of the changes on the screen and the auditory reinforcement of "beeps".

WHAT RESULTS SHOULD I EXPECT TO SEE AND HOW LONG BEFORE I SEE THEM?

My results with Neurofeedback were not instant. The first thing that changed was my awareness. I was more aware of stress and anxiety and how they didn't always go together. I remember feeling very anxious and telling a friend. Her response was a very typical one as she asked, "what's making you anxious"? I didn't have an answer. "Nothing" is what I told her because literally nothing was happening to explain this feeling I was having.

As my neuron patterns began to organize, the times that I felt anxious became more intense and clearer because I was also experiencing a calm that I hadn't before. I wasn't worse, just more aware.

My sleep was improving, although the improvements were a little inconsistent. One day I could train and would feel so relaxed and sleep amazing; another day I would do the exact same training and not feel as calm or sleep as well. I understood at that point what I had been telling my clients all along; your brain may be working on something different at the beginning and be inconsistent in symptom relief.

After some time, the session became very predictable and if I was having trouble sleeping, making lists of all of the bad things that had happened to me that day, experiencing negative thinking, having headaches or thinking in my head too much and having trouble with concentration, I knew it was time for a session.

Today my life is so different. I give lectures and talks to groups, classes, and anyone who asks me to. I love to sleep and enjoy waking up feeling so refreshed. I am calmer, more rational, able to handle stress, happier and more carefree. It's a strange feeling as this is who I have always been; my intentions and personality are exactly the same; and the only feeling I can say I have is one of freedom. I am no longer looking for the escape route or living in fear and I am no longer the emotional "girl" that everyone saw.

HOW DO I GET STARTED?

Getting started is easy, just give us a call. The Brain and Wellness Center staff will answer all of your questions, and help you get scheduled. If you are wondering what services are best for you? We can help determine that at the time of the intake, in a telephone consultation, or you can schedule a face to face consultation and see our facility. Call, email or message us today! Brain and Wellness Center, 7301 W. Palmetto Park Rd., Suite 102A, Boca Raton, FL 33433. (561) 206-2706, e-mail us at info@bocabraincenter.com, or text us at (561) 206-2706 or visit our website at www.BocaBrainCenter.com.

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Renee Chillcott is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor that has been practicing Neurofeedback training since 2005. Renee holds a BA degree from The University of Central Florida and a Master's Degree in Psychology from Nova Southeastern University. She is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and is the owner/operator of The Brain and Wellness Center, located in Boca Raton. At The Brain and Wellness Center, adults, teens, children and families enjoy a variety of services from multiple providers. Neurofeedback, Brain Mapping, Acupuncture, Nutritional Counseling, Learning Programs, and counseling are among a few of the services offered.



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