

Self-monitoring therapy helps reduce fatigue and stress in MS

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Fatigue is a common problem for many people with MS, and some people with MS can also experience mental health issues such as anxiety and stress. Each of these issues can have a large impact on a person's ability to function well in their daily lives and perform effectively at work.

A number of studies have looked at whether different types of psychological interventions may help people with MS to manage these symptoms. One [recent collaboration](#) between Australian researchers from several universities has studied a type of intervention called biofeedback. Biofeedback refers to recording basic biological measurements, such as breathing rate and muscle tension, in order to improve 'self-regulation'. Losing the feeling of self-control is commonly reported in people with high levels of anxiety or depression, and breathing rate is known to play a big role in restoring this sense of control.

This type of intervention has been shown to have benefits in other disorders, including headache, chronic pain, and anxiety disorders, but this is the first study that has looked at the use of biofeedback for MS.

The researchers designed a randomised controlled trial to assess the addition of biofeedback to a comprehensive program of psychological interventions.

One group of 20 people with relapsing-remitting MS (RRMS) received the standard interventions including relaxation, mindfulness, social support and education programs, while a second group of 20 people with RRMS received all of these interventions plus a biofeedback program, monitoring breathing rate and muscle tension.

Published recently in the *International Journal of MS Care*, the study results found that the group receiving biofeedback showed significant reductions in the levels of fatigue and stress, and smaller reductions in anxiety, after a three-week treatment period.

These outcomes can make a substantial difference on quality of life for many people with MS – for example, the [Australian MS Longitudinal Study](#) has previously shown that fatigue is the leading cause of departure from the workplace in over 70% of people with MS.

Interventions such as biofeedback can also help to increase the role of the individual in managing their symptoms, reducing any feelings of helplessness and encouraging people with MS to feel empowered in the management of their symptoms.

Although this study used a good-quality randomised controlled trial design, further research is needed to compare this intervention against other widely used evidence-based psychological interventions, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT). Nonetheless, these results suggest that biofeedback practices may be of benefit in reducing fatigue and stress for people with MS.