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## Happy clapping therapy

### Machine improves eye-hand coordination.

By **Bill Bowden**, Staff writerPosted: 12.19.06 - 10:42 AM | [▶ PRINT VERSION](#) | [▶ EMAIL TO A FRIEND](#)
 WEB EXCLUSIVE |  WEB ENHANCED |  PRINT EDITION

Bill Bingham has knocked six strokes off his golf game. But he had to stand in a small room and clap his hands for 40 minutes to do it.

A year ago, Bingham signed up for 15 sessions of Interactive Metronome therapy at HealthSouth Rehabilitation Hospital in Baton Rouge.

After the first three sessions, Bingham had taken one or two strokes off his game. His handicap is usually around nine now, meaning it takes him 81 strokes to golf a 72 par course.

"It made a better putter out of me," says Bingham, a retired salesman with Cintas Corp. "It makes you study the ball and move your head accordingly."

Interactive Metronome was developed in 1994 by Jim Cassily, a recording engineer who had worked with Janice Joplin and Bob Seger. Cassily, who taught piano lessons on the side, discovered that I.M. helped his autistic students. Not only did they get the timing down, it also helped them with attention, concentration, coordination, language processing, reading skills and control of aggression.

Medical studies began with I.M. in 2001, says Al Guerra, a vice president of the company. Now, it's also used for patients suffering from stroke, brain injury, amputation or Parkinson's Disease. Researchers believe I.M. helps the brain repair itself. "This whole thing has been kind of a happy accident," says Guerra.

Before long, athletes began using to improve eye/hand coordination. A study by the University of Central Michigan found that I.M. improved "shot accuracy" for golfers by 20%.

Now, some 2,500 therapists at 1,700 hospitals, clinics and universities use I.M. HealthSouth is the only hospital in Baton Rouge that has one of the \$3,000 machines, says Kenneth Alexander, CEO and administrator of the facility. Four clinics in the city may also have I.M. therapy.

The hardware consists of a black box wired to a laptop computer. The user wears headphones and either claps or tap dances in time with a metronome. The feedback is both visual and audible. Circles on the computer screen light up to let the user know if they're clapping too fast or too slow. At the same time, cowbells, bongs or beeps sound through the headphones, corresponding with the visual information. If a clap is perfectly on time, it sounds like a plucking of a rubber band to the headphone wearer.



I.M. costs \$60 for a one-hour session at HealthSouth. The therapy usually consists of 12 to 15 sessions. At HealthSouth in Baton Rouge, I.M. is used to help children with Attention Deficit Disorder and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder. It also helps kids who have concentration and reading problems, boosting grades and improving reading and math scores by 7% to 20%. The researchers say I.M. affects the internal timing of the brain.

"It stimulates the processing center of the brain," says Stacie Didier, a speech pathologist at HealthSouth. "We're using it a lot for our stroke patients. Natural timing and motor planning is crucial to everything we do."

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