

# REHABILITATION NOTES

REHABILITATION SECTION  
BALTIMORE CITY MEDICAL SOCIETY

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## FUNCTIONAL EVALUATION: THE BARTHEL INDEX

*A simple index of independence useful in scoring improvement in the rehabilitation of the chronically ill*

Since 1955, the chronic disease hospitals in Maryland (Montebello State Hospital, Deer's Head Hospital, and Western Maryland Hospital) have been using a simple index of independence to score the ability of a patient with a neuro-muscular or musculoskeletal disorder to care for himself, and by repeating the test periodically, to assess his improvement. The Index (BI) has also been taught to many nurses, who have been helpful in evaluating patients prior to admission to these hospitals and after discharge.

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AND  
DOROTHEA W. BARTHEL, BA, PT

The values assigned to each item are based on time and amount of actual physical assistance required if a patient is unable to perform the activity. Full credit is not given for an activity if the patient needs even minimal help and/or supervision, ie, if he cannot safely perform the activity without someone present in the room with him. Because of the time required to attend an incontinent patient and since he is not socially acceptable, continence was weighted heavily.

Environmental conditions may affect the patient's score. If he has special requirements (other than the usual home setting), his score will be lower when they are not met. Examples are: doorways wide enough for easy access by wheelchair; all rooms on the same level if he cannot walk; grab bars at the toilet and tub.

To be more valuable, an explanation of special environmental requirements should accompany the BI of each patient when these are indicated.

Each patient's BI is scored at the beginning of treatment in the Rehabilitation Service (PM&R), at intervals during the course of his rehabilitation, and at the time of maximum benefit. In this way, it is possible to determine how well and how rapidly he has progressed toward independence. Sometimes improvement does not show up because the presence of another person may still be required even though he does not actually give physical assistance. Usually lack of improvement in the BI after a reasonable period of treatment indicates poor potential for rehabilitation.

# Functional Evaluation The Barthel Index

**TD Snyder**



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