

Autogenic Training

Symptoms Addressed

- Emotion regulation
- Reactivity to trauma triggers
- Stress response
- DSM-5 PTSD arousal and reactivity symptoms

Autogenic training is a mindfulness practice where the participant focuses on selected sensations in the body as a way of achieving a state of deep relaxation (Stetter & Kupper, 2002). Autogenic training improves self-regulatory capacities and trains individuals to modify the functioning of their autonomic nervous system by repeating a sequence of statements about warm and heavy sensations felt throughout the body.

AUTOGENIC TRAINING TIPS

- It is recommended that participants practice this meditation multiple times per day for short periods of time (5-10 minutes). If possible, encourage clients to try to practice 2-3 times per day.
- It is best to practice in a quiet space or room, without distractions.
- Clients may complete this exercise while sitting or lying down. If the participant is seated in a chair, instruct them to try to straighten their back, with their feet flat on the floor.
- If a participant suffers from heart disease or high blood pressure, use caution in practicing this exercise and have them speak with their physician before engaging in autonomic training.

KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS

- Increases heart rate variability and improves vagal heart control (Miu, Heilman, & Miclea, 2009), thereby reducing individuals' levels of stress and anxiety
- Reduces anxiety (Bowden, Lorenc, & Robinson, 2012; Dhiman & Bedi, 2010)
- Improves self-monitoring and self-regulation (Shinozaki et al., 2010)
- Reduces insomnia, depression, and a variety of health conditions (Bowden et al., 2012)

Autogenic Training

Begin to slowly close your eyes and draw your attention to the breath, starting to breathe deep into the diaphragm.

ARMS

Begin autogenic training by stating to yourself: *I am completely calm.*

Now gently direct your focus to your arms, feeling into your arms, noticing any sensations or experiences in this area.

State to yourself: *My arms are heavy* (repeat 6 times).

And now state to yourself: *I am completely calm.*

Maintaining focus on your arms, once again feel into your arms, noticing any sensations that may be present.

Still focusing on your arms, state: *My arms are warm* (repeat 6 times).

Finally, state to yourself: *I am completely calm.*

LEGS

Now gently direct your focus to your legs, feeling into your legs, noticing any sensations or experiences in this area.

State to yourself: *My legs are heavy* (repeat 6 times).

And now state to yourself: *I am completely calm.*

Maintaining focus on your legs, once again feel into your legs, noticing any sensations that may be present.

Still focusing on your legs, state: *My legs are warm* (repeat 6 times).

Finally, state to yourself: *I am completely calm.*

HEART

Now gently direct your focus to your heart, noticing any sensations or experiences in this area.

State to yourself: *My heartbeat is calm and slow* (repeat 6 times).

And now state to yourself: *I am completely calm.*

BREATH

Now gently direct your focus to your breath, noticing any sensations or experiences in this area.

State to yourself: *My breath is calm and steady* (repeat 6 times).

Now state to yourself: *I am completely calm.*

STOMACH

Now gently direct your focus to your stomach, noticing any sensations or experiences in this area.

State to yourself: *My stomach is soft and warm* (repeat 6 times).

Now state to yourself: *I am completely calm.*

Now gently direct your focus to your forehead, noticing any sensations or experiences.

State to yourself: *My forehead is cool and relaxed* (repeat 6 times).

Now state to yourself: *I am completely calm.*

Shift your attention back to the breath for a moment, practicing focused, diaphragmatic breathing. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation before ending this exercise.