

Autogenic Training

What is autogenic training?

Autogenic training is a relaxation technique that uses the Power of the Mind to relax the body. The term autogenic means “coming from within.” You can also think of it as a form of self-hypnosis. Establishing a routine practice may improve your overall health.

What can autogenic training help with?

Research shows autogenic training can help with many health concerns, including the following:¹

- Tension and migraine headaches
- High blood pressure
- Disease of the blood vessels
- Asthma
- Pain without an obvious physical cause
- Depression and anxiety
- Sleep problems
- Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)²
- Some symptoms caused by Parkinson’s disease³

Are there any risks?

In general, autogenic training is very safe. The technique may be less safe for patients who have severe mental illness. Autogenic training is not advised for patients who have psychotic disorders like schizophrenia. If you have a history of mental illness, you may want to talk with your primary care provider before trying it out. You may also want to work with someone who can teach you about autogenic training before trying it on your own.

It is important to remember that autogenic training works together with your other treatments, such as medications and mental health care. Autogenic training should not replace other treatments recommended by your health care team.

What does this training look like?

Autogenic training may be done one-on-one or in a group. A session can last 15-20 minutes or longer.⁴ Participants are asked to find a comfortable position, usually sitting upright or laying down. They close their eyes and slowly repeat specific phrases that are intended to create calming sensations and relax different areas of the body. There are generally 6 focus areas.

1. Heaviness in your muscles
2. Warmth in your arms, legs, and other body areas
3. Slower and more relaxed heartbeat
4. Slower and more relaxed breathing
5. Relaxation of the belly
6. Coolness of the forehead

Autogenic Training Exercise⁵

Try the following exercise to get a better sense of what an autogenic training session may feel like. If you run into any problems during this exercise, please talk to your health care team. Only try this exercise if you feel safe doing so.

Start by finding a quiet, comfortable place where you can close your eyes. Below you will find 6 different sets of phrases. There is one phrase per line. Start with the first set and silently say to yourself, "My right arm is heavy." Close your eyes and repeat each phrase 4 times before moving to the next line. Your pace should be slow and relaxed. Before you begin, experiment with what it feels like to take 5 seconds to say "My right arm is heavy." Pause for 3 seconds between each statement.

Set 1: Heavy

My right arm is heavy.
My left arm is heavy.
Both of my arms are heavy.
My right leg is heavy.
My left leg is heavy.
Both of my legs are heavy.
My arms and my legs are heavy.

Set 2: Warmth

My right arm is warm.
My left arm is warm.
Both of my arms are warm.
My right leg is warm.
My left leg is warm.
Both of my legs are warm.
My arms and my legs are warm.

Set 3: Calm Heart

My arms are heavy and warm.
My legs are heavy and warm.
My arms and legs are heavy and warm.
I feel calm.
My heart feels warm and pleasant.
My heartbeat is calm and regular.

Set 4: Breathing

My arms are heavy and warm.
My legs are heavy and warm.
My arms and legs are heavy and warm.
I feel calm.
My heartbeat is calm and regular.
My breathing breathes me.

Set 5: Stomach

My arms are heavy and warm.
My legs are heavy and warm.
My arms and legs are heavy and warm.
I feel calm.
My heart feels calm and regular.
My breathing breathes me.
My stomach is soft and warm.

Set 6: Cool Forehead

My arms are heavy and warm.
My legs are heavy and warm.
My arms and legs are heavy and warm.
I feel calm.
My heartbeat is calm and regular.
My breathing breathes me.
My stomach is soft and warm.
My forehead is cool.

Other helpful suggestions:

- Consider making a voice recording of the phrases so you can follow along instead of having to open your eyes to read each one. You can also try practicing each set one at a time until you memorize the whole set of phrases.
- Consider coming up with your own calming phrases.
- If you say the phrase but do not feel the results of what you are saying, continue to repeat the phrase. It may take time for you to actually feel heavy, calm, and warm or cool sensations in your body.
- Prepare your mind and body before starting your autogenic training practice. Begin by breathing deeply. Try to make your exhale longer than your inhale. Your breathing should feel comfortable and relaxing. Do this for 2-3 minutes before moving on to the autogenic phrases.
- To end the session, it may be helpful to “cancel” the relaxation response. The phrase that is often used to do this is “Arms firm. Breathe deeply. Open Eyes.”⁴
- Practice at least once daily. Practicing before bed as part of your nightly routine may improve your sleep.

How can I find a provider who can help me develop my autogenic training skills?

Some mental health providers may be able to help you with autogenic training or know someone who can. If you have a smart phone, there are also free and inexpensive autogenetic training apps. However, it is ideal to first learn autogenic training with the help of a professional. He or she will be able to help you get the most out of the training. This person can also answer any questions or concerns that may come up. Once you learn the process, you can easily practice on your own.

For you to consider:

- What personal or health goals would you like to accomplish in the near future?
- Do you think autogenic training could help you reach your goals?
- Are you interested in meeting with a provider to talk about autogenic training? If so, whom will you contact?

The information in this handout is general. **Please work with your health care team to use the information in the best way possible to promote your health and happiness.**

For more information:

ORGANIZATION	RESOURCES	WEBSITE
University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program	A variety of Integrative Whole Health handouts on your surroundings	https://www.fammed.wisc.edu/integrative/resources/modules/
Good Therapy Website	Additional information on autogenic training	http://www.goodtherapy.org/learn-about-therapy/types/autogenic-training



This handout was adapted for the University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program from the original written for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) by Alexandra Ilkevitch MD, Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation Physician at Wildwood Family Clinic and Honorary Fellow, Integrative Health Program, University of Wisconsin Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. It is based in part on a tool for clinicians, "Autogenic Training," written by Shilagh A. Mirgain, PhD and Janice Singles, PsyD. The handout was reviewed and edited by Veterans and VHA subject matter experts.

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