Autogenic training – autogenic therapy

- Psychophysiologically orientated bio-behavioral psychotherapy,
- based on relaxation
Overview of autogenic therapy

- a powerful and comprehensive therapeutic system encompassing both mind and body

- enabling clients to utilise their own capacity for self-healing and self-development
Overview of Autogenic Therapy 2

- A training course during which clients learn a series of simple exercises in body awareness and relaxation designed to
  - switch off the stress-related 'fight and flight' system of the body and
  - switch on the 'rest, relaxation and recreation' system
Overview of Autogenic Therapy 3

- The client has the opportunity to learn and experience passive concentration, a state of alert but detached awareness that enables the trainee to break through the vicious circle of excessive stress, whatever its origins.

- Once learnt, these techniques form a lifelong skill that can become part of a health-promoting lifestyle.
Overview of Autogenic Therapy 3

- Existence of a personalized therapeutic relationship may serve to enhance compliance and credibility.
Definition

- Autogenic (autos...genos) (self-exercise, self-induced)
- training to make an active (self hypnotic) connection between mind and body
- self healing power of the body
Definition 2

- reducing the excessive autonomic arousal but useful to rising dysfunctional low level of autonomic function

- passive attentive concentration (from outer to inner on the body sensations)
The main benefits of autogenic training!

- **Autogenic therapy, as a stand-alone treatment can:**
  - Help people switch from stress to relaxation at will
  - Reduce or eliminate anxiety and panic attacks
  - Increase confidence and self-esteem
  - Significantly improve sleep quality
  - Reduce the incidence of mild to moderate depression
  - Offer a tool for self-empowerment and feeling to be more in control
  - Increase concentration and focus
History

- Most important authors:
  - J.H. Schultz, (neurologist)
    Germany from the 1920s
    (Autogenic Training)
  - W. Luthe, Canada,
    from the 1960s
    (Autogenic Therapy)
Relaxation

- somatic and psychic quietness, harmonious and optimal state of vegetative functions

Some features of relaxation:
- **somatic**: decreased tone of muscles, optimal function of vegetative organs
- **psychic**: quietness, peacefulness, rest
Mechanism

- The response can be *conditioned and habituated* by repeated training (learning, conditioning) and can be recalled in optimal situations in order to *reduce emotional tension or functional symptoms* of excessive activity or anxiety.

- The aim of the autogenic training is to influence the state of vegetative nervous system in order to reduce affective vegetative resonance or to reach an optimal functioning of vegetative and emotional mechanisms by a self-controlled learning process (conditioning).
Group training vs. Individual training

Individual training
- Much more expensive (financial as well as therapeutic)
- Can be adjusted to meet an individual’s needs
- A personalized therapeutic relationship may serve to enhance compliance and credibility
- If the course AT is integrated into an individualized treatment package requiring one-to-one-therapy
Group training vs. Individual training

- **Group training**
  - Is more cost effective
  - Permits less individualized attention
  - A group has the potential to develop cohesion
  - Serve as support system for its members
  - 8-12 group members are preferred
Setting
Setting - environmental conditions:

- comfortable room
- resting place, without strong stimuli (noise, light)
- minimal possibility for disruptions (mobile phone)
- room temperature of 20-22°C
- quiet and slightly darkened room
Setting - position of the body

- usually a lying position (is better), sometimes a sitting position (a chair with a high back is best e.g. in the office)
- On a couch or on an exercise mattress (plus pillows)
- Should have the possibly to stretch out
- Adjustable room lightning
- The entire body must feel comfortable
- Any muscle tension would interfere with the progress of the exercises
- Using a rolled-up or fitted pillow is preferable
Setting - position of the body

- The arms should lie flat beside the body
- Slightly bent at the elbows
- Palms of the hands should be placed flat on the surface
- The tips of the feet should be allowed to fall slightly to the outside
Setting - intrapsychic conditions

- acceptance of the situation
- positive attitudes
- positive regard
- acceptance of somatic and psychic experiences
- Attempting to learn AT
- Completely focused on him- or herself
- Any speech during the training impedes the basic principle of “autogenic”
  - The person will go through a light heterohypnosis
Self-induction - Formula

- The method rests upon the self-induction of trance
  - a state of narrowed attention
- attention to external stimuli is reduced but not wholly abandoned. Regular practice induce
  - a sense of personal control
  - a sense of calmness and, as therapy progresses,
  - an experience of anxiety in order to practise control over the anxiety
Standard exercises

1. Quite
2. Muscle system (subjective experience: heaviness in the limbs)
3. Circulation, distribution of blood (warmness in the body)
4. Breath
5. Heart
6. Abdomen
7. Head (cerebrovascular system)
Before starting - rest exercise

- “I am very quite”
- „I am very relaxed“
- relaxation in general
1. The heaviness experience (muscular relaxation).

q  “The right arm is very heavy”
q  “I am very quite”
1. The heaviness experience (muscular relaxation)

- This is most easily influenced by conscious efforts
- A particular muscle relaxation can be achieved rapidly and notably through hypnosis and relaxation suggestions (Paul, 1969)
- Muscle relaxation is a heaviness of the extremities (during the nightly sleep)
- The extremities seem to „detach“ themselves from the body
1. The heaviness experience (muscular relaxation)

- Relaxation of the entire body is not possible at this time because of the concentration
- The training should begin with one arm
- If one arm has been trained for a reasonable period of time, the experience of heaviness during muscle relaxation will generalize to other body systems since all extremities and organs are accessed by the same nervous system.
1. The heaviness experience (muscular relaxation)

Possible Problems – Suggested Solutions

This is the first exercise and the first experience with any kind of systematic relaxation

- Perhaps fear-arousing
- Brief localized spasms
- Tingling
- Numbness
- A pulling sensation
- Perceived swelling in the fingers
- Sense of detachment from a limb
1. The heaviness experience (muscular relaxation)

Possible Problems – Suggested Solutions

- It is important to ask the trainee about these at the end of the training
  - To provide the requisite explanations

- The patient should be assured that
  - These are normal
  - They will decrease in intensity and frequency with practice
  - Some cramping may be the result of “training too hard”
Content of Sequences of Exercises 2

2. Experience of warmth (vascular dilatation)
   Once the first exercise has been well trained and is rapidly inducible it can be extended by the inclusion of the second formula:
   
   “Arms (legs) are very heavy.
   “The right arm is very warm”
2. Experience of warmth (vascular dilatation)

- A warmth experience
- This exercise affects the entire peripheral cardiovascular system
- Every emotional activity tends to be associated with a change in blood flow (Linden, 1987)
  - Flushing or paleness
- Trainability of vessel changes in the hypnotic state is well known
2. Experience of warmth (vascular dilatation)

- It affects
  - The arteries
  - The entire peripheral cardiovascular system
  - Capillaries in the organs
  - The venous blood flow
  - The flow of blood through the skin and musculature
2. Experience of warmth
(vascular dilatation)

- Distribution of the blood in the vessels
  - is regulated by the constriction and dilation
  - Take place as a response to nervous system innervations

- Magnitude and direction of the nervous system innervations are determined by
  - physical activity
  - General state of arousal
  - inhibition
2. Experience of warmth (vascular dilatation)

Possible Problems – Suggested Solutions

- There are two extremes
  - Some patients report “burning” of the arm
  - Some patients report “cooling” of the arm

- In case of extremely sensations
  - The trainee should do the “taking back“ procedure
  - The unwanted sensation will usually disappear
  - The formula can be changed in
    - „pleasantly warm“
Content of Sequences of Exercises

3. Regulation of the heart

Once heaviness and warmth in both arms can be rapidly and reliably achieved, the third exercise can be added. (typically occurs in the fourth weekly training session)

“The heart is beating quietly and strongly (regularly)”

„My heartbeat is clam and strong“
3. Regulation of the Heart

- A skill to influence a body system that was initially considered autonomous (the blood vessels also)
  - Learning to experience the activity of the heart itself

- Is the innervation of the heart rhythm

- Physical symptoms of the heart in times of
  - Strain
  - Excitement
  - Fever
3. Regulation of the Heart

Possible Problems – Suggested Solutions

- There are various body sites to report the heart pulsations
  - The chest
  - Finger tips
  - Feet
  - Earlobes
  - Temples
  - Neck

- This experience is associated with anxiety-arousing
Content of Sequences of Exercises

4. Regulating of breathing
   “It breathes me”
   That make it clear that relaxation and the regulation of breathing will come by themselves
   It typically takes 7-10 days
   Steps 1-4 take about 5-6 weeks
4. Regulating of breathing

Breathing
- An intentional and autonomous activity
- Is supposed to function autonomously and in a self regulatory manner without any active adjustment

The rhythm of breathing influence
- Muscular relaxation
- Vascular relaxation
- Heart relaxation
4. Regulating of breathing

- Possible Problems – Suggested Solutions
  - It is important that trainees do not actively try to change their breathing patterns
  - “being lifted up and then lowered by a wave”
Content of Sequences of Exercises

5. Regulation of visceral organs ("Sun Rays") (The formula 1-4 have been fully trained)
   - "Sun rays are streaming quiet and warm"
   - "Warmth is radiating over my stomach."

   Regulation of visceral organs
5. Regulation of visceral organs ("Sun Rays")

Possible Problems – Suggested Solutions

- Rumbling
  - A feeling of pressure in the stomach or crampy feelings
  - Is very unpleasant
  - Rigorous taking back will eliminate them promptly
  - It is good to stop the exercise and eat a little before continuing.
  - AT with great hunger pangs or a stuffed stomach is not a good idea
6. Regulation of the head

- “The forehead is cool”
- Relaxing effect of a cool cloth on the forehead
- Lead to a localized vasoconstriction
- Is sensed like a cool breeze
- This exercise can also be learned in 7-10 days
6. Regulation of the head

Possible Problems – Suggested Solutions

- It is the most difficult to achieve
- moisturizing of the forehead
- New formula:
  - „Facial skin is relaxed and smooth“
- Many trainees report having trouble to fall asleep after the exercise
  - When they have used AT late in the evening as a sleep inducer
Taking back
Taking back

- The trainee should not abruptly terminate the exercise by simply jumping up.
- Trainees should:
  - Reactivate their muscular and breathing system.
  - Make a couple of fists and bend their arms inward.
  - Breath in deeply a few times.
  - Finally open their eyes and sit up.
  - It takes over a 1-minute interval.
Advanced Autogenic Training

At advanced level, additional suggestions may be incorporated into the training program. The six phrases to use are:

- 1: My body is very heavy (promotes muscle relaxation)
- 2: I am very warm (relaxes your blood vessels and enhances circulation)
- 3: My heartbeat is calm and regular (regulates your pulse)
- 4: My breathing is calm and regular (relaxes your lungs and airways)
- 5: My abdomen is warm and relaxed (relaxes your stomach and exercises the abdominal wall)
- 6: My forehead is cool and clear (relieves tension in your head)
Advanced Autogenic Training

Autogenic Meditation and Autogenic Neutralisation can be used to

- address psychological problems that arise early in AT
- to address underlying problems in the psyche of the individual
Advanced Autogenic Training

- The meditative element encourages the individual to
  - meditate around colours, objects, and then the notions such as love
  - ask who it is they are and what they wish to do in life
  - let their natural process of mental healing guide them through traumatic experiences, with the help of their analyst
Advanced Autogenic Training

empower the individual and give them valuable methods that work as an everyday means to control stress and to approach some of the sensations that arise during meditation and relaxation
Effects

- Influence of anxiety and nervousness (Schrapper & Mann, 1985)
- From the sixth week, mental freshness decrease Hypertension (amplitude) (Watanabe et al., 2003)
- Effects similar to those of drugs for hypertension, stage 1 (Linden & Chambers, 1994)
Autogenic training for healthy individuals

- personal growth and development
- more adequate knowledge on himself
- more effective adjustment, prevention
Application and indication

- all the functional vegetative dysfunctions
- functional components of organic disorders, pain
- psychosomatic and neurotic symptoms
- exaggerated reactions of fear or anxiety, or sensitivity etc
Indication for an autogenic therapy

- Traumatic experiences indicated verbally or on assessment sheet
- High autogenic discharge level
- High emotional excitation level
- Persistent occurrence of differentiated mental images during AT
Contraindications

- These are the same as for the meditative exercises:
  - where the ego is not strong enough to handle the emergence of too much traumatic material
  - Borderline, psychosis