

Autogenic Training

The Autogenic Training technique is very similar to self-hypnosis, which is discussed in detail in Chapter 20. The basic idea is that the mind has power over the body. You will utilize that power to produce the relaxation response through a process of very active thinking. In this way, it is very different from PMR. During PMR you passively listen to directions and follow them. In Autogenic relaxation you need to be actively repeating certain thoughts in your mind the whole time.

There are certain physical sensations that are typically associated with the relaxation response: (1) heaviness in the limbs, (2) warmth in the limbs, (3) a slower heart beat, (4) a slower and deeper rhythm of breathing, and (4) coolness on the forehead. In this technique you will focus on each one of these sensations individually, repeating them and imagining them occurring in your body. Your body will respond by making them real.

With a professional sport psychologist you would work for weeks at a time on each individual sensation, learning to produce it quickly, before moving on to the next one. In this section you will learn a condensed version that will produce more immediate effects. You will spend about four or five minutes focusing on each sensation, resulting in a total time of about 20 minutes.

You will focus your mind and repeat to yourself the five suggestions described below until you achieve a relaxed state. Following is a sample script you could use to guide your mental suggestion. You could read through it entirely first, and then close your eyes and do it from memory. You could have someone read it out loud to you. Or you could make a recording of it to guide you through. Remember, the dots “. . .” mean a three or four second pause.

Procedure

Sit or lie comfortably, close your eyes, and focus your attention entirely on your breathing. Take five deep, slow breaths while you focus on the feeling of your stomach rising and falling. . . .

1. **Heaviness.** Repeat the following suggestion to yourself over and over again for about four minutes: *My hands are beginning to feel very heavy. . . . They are feeling heavier and heavier . . . I can feel them sinking lower and lower. . . . My arms are beginning to feel heavier and heavier . . . My legs are feeling very, very heavy . . . I can feel the heaviness moving up and down my hands, arms, legs, and feet . . . heavier and heavier. . . .* [You may imagine them sinking down into the chair, desk, or floor that they are resting on]

2. **Warmth.** Repeat the following suggestion to yourself over and over again for about four minutes: *My hands are beginning to feel very warm . . . Warmer and warmer The warmth is spreading up my arms . . . they are getting warmer and warmer. . . . My legs and feet are feeling warmer and warmer I can feel the warmth spreading through hands, arms, legs, and feet. . . .* [You may imagine something warm like fire heating up your limbs]
3. **Heart Rate.** Repeat the following suggestion to yourself over and over again for about four minutes: *My heart rate is becoming slower and slower. . . . It is becoming slower and more regular It is beating slower and slower Slower and more consistent My heart rate is slowing down more and more. . . .* [You may imagine a clock or metronome gradually slowing down]
4. **Breathing.** Repeat the following suggestion to yourself over and over again for about four minutes: *My breathing is becoming slower and slower It is becoming slower and more regular. . . . My breathing is very deep, slow, and regular Easy, slow, and regular* [You may imagine yourself as a hibernating bear, breathing very slowly, or your breathing as a slow wind entering and exiting from the mouth of a cave]
5. **Forehead.** Repeat the following suggestion to yourself over and over again for about four minutes: *My forehead is beginning to feel cool It is feeling cooler and cooler cooler and cooler. . . .* [You may imagine something cool like a damp cloth or ice on your forehead]