

## Autogenic training – current tradition (not only) in stress management

**Pavel Humpolíček**

Psychologický ústav FFMU, Brno

hump@phil.muni.cz

*Autogenic training (or autogen) is a worldwide highly-appreciated relaxing method. Its simplicity and basic field of focus makes it very often used procedure in these stressful times. The traditional concept in a modern way may be an important element of our “anti-stress equipment”.*

*Key words: autogenic training, autogen, relaxing method, anti-stress, AT*

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Autogenic training (AT) was developed by the German neurologist J.H. Schultz, who was inspired by yoga and other procedures (autohypnosis, Jacobson's progressive muscle relaxation, Ideomotoric phenomena...)

TRADITION:

The basic level of AT comprises:

- Heaviness
- Warmth
- Breathing
- A Calm Heart
- Stomach Regulation
- Cool Forehead

The basic level of AT may also include individual affirmations, used in form of “inner talk” in relaxed state, that come from principles of autosuggestion.

The higher level of AT works mainly with imaginations – for example colours, objects, values or feelings.

The original basic-level training (the important part of AT focused on relaxation) was divided into individual steps and spreaded up to 2-3 months. It is recommended to do the training 10-15 minutes, 2-3 times a day. However, Schultz warns that it is important to be aware of progress of the individual trainee and therefore the effective range of training is between 1-30 minutes a day.

It is recommended to do the training with your eyes closed and in one of relaxing position (sitting or lying).

TODAY:

Therapeutic practice and modern research confirm that the original concept of AT is a beneficial base (on the bio-psycho-social-model level).

Training of AT is more suitable and more effective (more efficient and faster) with a psychotherapy professional supervising, however AT is safe enough form of relaxation that it is possible to train it by yourself.

With a therapeutic supervision you may avoid a lot of mistakes and „blind alleys“. One is not always willing to find therapy, though, and relies on oneself. Also some doctors or psychologists unfortunately don't know AT or they don't do it.

My personal note:

In last few years (probably because of the socio-economic crisis) I have found how effective AT is in interviews with people, who experience states of anxiety or sleep disorders. I also use supportive effect of AT in other problems – conditional psychosomatic problems, phobic states, OCD... or for self-development of patient/client.

Especially, in cases of sleep disorders or states of anxiety, any non-pharmacological option is highly demanded not only by patients, but by doctors too.

TRAINING:

Symbolic aims of AT are “**warm heart**” (full of power, “fire”, vitality and healthy emotions) and “**cool head**” (clearly and rationally thinking, accepting intuitive and intellectual things).

Real aims are **strengthening of** (a) **immunity** (digestive system) and (b) **natural homeostatic functions of organism** (secretion/excretion by hollow organs, skin or breath, lymphatic and vascular system, etc.).

Principles, which are used in modern version of AT, remain the same. Patient **works with heaviness** (muscle relaxation), **warmth and total body relaxation**. Nevertheless, the training is not as monotonous and strict as it was 90 years ago. Therapist more co-operates with client. He is looking for possible “tuning” of the traditional technique, that fits the best for the individual trainee.

**Table I. The way of training AT**

What you aim to achieve	Typical attitude	Variety of your subjective perception of the target	Typical supporting autosuggestion	Other supporting autosuggestion	Necessity of the training for effective rehearsal
<b>Muscle relaxation</b>	Feeling of heaviness	Heaviness Lightness Lost of the perception of your body and extremities	My body is heavy; I can feel pleasant heaviness of whole of my body; My body is heavy as if it was made of stone, metal or lead.	My muscles are relaxed; I relax; a wave of release attached to exhale; to realize a body contact with a mattress	Necessary, compulsory
<b>Body warming from shoulders towards hands and feet</b>	Feeling of warmth	Heat Warmth Comfortable temperature (e.g. to cool down in hot summer)	My body is warm; I can feel pleasant warmth throughout my body.	As if the sun was shining on my body or as if it was sunk in a warm bath	Comfortable temperature is necessary, compulsory (when it comes to patients with cardiovascular diseases, the warmth is not strengthened)

<b>Calm breathing</b>	Autonomous breathing	Feel your breathing without concentrating on it	My breath is calm, deep and regular; I can breathe;	I breathe easily	Necessary/ Unnecessary (It may make sensitive people feel anxious)
<b>Calm pulse</b>	Regular heart beat	Watching the heart beat	My pulse is calm, strong and regular	My heart beats calmly and regularly	Necessary/ Unnecessary (It may make sensitive people feel anxious)
<b>Warmth in the abdomen</b>	Warmth in the area of solar plexus	Warmth in the intersection of axes between the stomach, the pelvis, left and right side of belly, the navel and the spine	My belly is warm; I can feel the warmth inside of my belly; As if the hot water bottle was laid on my belly; Sun is shining on my belly;	The feeling after drinking of a warm beverage (tea) of eating of a hot soup; yellow and orange colour in the area of the belly	Compulsory (important for immunity system and for strengthening of the contact between body and mind (psychosomatic))
<b>Cold forehead</b>	Coldness on a forehead	Coldness on a forehead	My forehead is cold; A pleasant feeling of coldness on the forehead; As if the person was standing at the window and cool breeze was touching the forehead	The forehead is blue, light-blue or turquoise; drops of dew on the forehead	Non-compulsory, but recommended (helpful to the active concentrated attention; it should be pleasant cold, not freezing)
<b>Awakening</b>	Re-activation of body and mind	Return to the wakeful state	We realize that all the feeling disappeared and only calmness, vitality and comfort persist	The forehead is blue, light-blue or turquoise; drops of dew on the forehead	Appropriate, recommended (deep inhale into the belly; while exhaling, we move our fingers, toes, slowly open our eyes, stretch and realize the nearest targets and needs)

**Table II. AT in certain time periods is very effective, especially for those who aim to achieve self-development.**

<b>Time</b>	<b>Day-time</b>	<b>Length of the exercise</b>	<b>Description of the exercise</b>
1 <sup>st</sup> week	In the evening – before going to sleep – regularly when I lay down in bed with intention of sleeping	From a few seconds to +/- 5 minutes	To be aware of the body, mind mapping while falling asleep; to look for natural mechanisms which leads body to the relaxing
2 <sup>nd</sup> week	In the evening – before going to sleep	From 2 minutes to +/- 10 minutes	Aimed muscle relaxation (extremities, trunk, head – scalp, eye, tongue, cheek, masseter muscles) + awareness of warmth in extremities
3 <sup>rd</sup> and 4 <sup>th</sup> week	In the evening – before going to sleep	From 2 minutes to +/- 7 minutes	To add to the previous the feeling of warmth in belly, cold forehead and complete awareness of being calm and feel comfortable
5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> week	In the evening – before going to sleep	From 30 seconds to +/- 5 minutes	To enjoy relaxing and ease; start work with autosuggestions (at the end of the exercise)
5 <sup>th</sup> and 6 <sup>th</sup> week	2 or 3 times during an active part of the day	From 30 seconds to 3 minutes	To stop an activity (mainly when efficiency goes down naturally), close eyes for a while and imagine the feeling which you have while evening relaxation
From the 6 <sup>th</sup> week	According to needs and feelings	According to needs and feelings	To choose the kind of exercise which is the most suitable for actual feelings and needs

Unlike traditional conception, **primary** aspect is quality (“**feeling good**”) during the training and consistent observance of the training routine is secondary, today.

It is appropriate to make certain **“exercising schemes”** after a while, but it is possible to modify their use (to one's age, day time, stress load, etc.).

Human body works in many respects faster and more effectively than we are willing to admit. Majority of processes is happening without our knowledge (without our conscious control), but still highly effectively.

If we aim to prevention (of somatic/chronic diseases, stress consequences, conditions of collapse, etc.), **we are in many respects “only” able to rely on natural needs of the human organism to be “healthy and feel good”**. The only thing, that remains, is **not to “interfere” to our needs with conscious effort to increase the feeling of health, happiness and peace**.

For deeper understanding of minor changes in today's application towards traditional conception of training of AT, I recommend these areas: theory of motivation, theory of biological/somatic markers, “placebo effect”, neuroplasticity and its basic principle “use it or lose it”, quality resources from hypnotherapy area or use of imagination in therapeutic practice, etc.

If this article contributes to urge of reader to actively work on his psycho-somatic health, it fulfilled its purpose...

Wishing permanent health and peace to you all,  
Pavel Humpolíček

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