

Wellspring: Student Wellness Program Self-Help Stress Management Strategies

Autogenic exercises

Autogenic exercises use passive thinking. Passive repetition is an effective way to increase relaxation and calmness. Here are five helpful tips to do the exercise most effectively. The exercise lasts for about 15 minutes when done properly. It is not to be rushed through.

When going through the exercise, you should hold muscle contractions for 4-6 seconds. If you can have someone read it to you, it will be helpful. You can also go through the exercise a few times and then run through the exercise by remembering the steps, or you could record yourself saying the exercise slowly and play it back when you need it.

Think “Heavy”

This suggestion is claimed to increase muscle relaxation. A relaxed muscle will actually feel “heavy” because less effort is exerted keeping the muscle firm. You may notice this when, after an exhausting day, you fall heavily into bed, or become so relaxed in a chair that you can barely get up.

Think “Warm”

This suggestion is claimed to increase blood flow to the fingers, hands, and feet. When you are feeling relaxed, blood flow increases to the extremities, contributing to feelings of warmth. However, when you are under stress blood flows away from the extremities, which contributes to “cold, clammy hands.”

Think “Quiet, even beating heart”

Most people understand that when they are under stress, their heart starts beating hard, sometimes irregularly.

Think “My breathing is free and easy and effortless”

When you are relaxed, breathing is more slow and even. Breathing is both voluntary and involuntary. You can deliberately take in a deep breath, but we continue breathing even when we are not thinking about it.

Think “Sun rays streaming warm and quiet”

In this suggestion, focus on the solar plexus, an important nerve center for internal organs. The solar plexus is halfway between the navel and the lower portion of the sternum in the upper half of the body.

Phases to be mentally repeated for autogenic exercises:

Think “Heavy, heavy, body feels heavy and relaxed. Hands and arms and legs feel heavy and relaxed.”

Think “Warm and relaxed. Hands and arms and legs feel warm and relaxed. Like warm sand or water or sun. Warm and relaxed.”

Think “My heart is beating quiet and even. Relaxed and even heartbeat. Relaxed and quiet heartbeat.”

Think “My breathing is free and easy and effortless. Free and easy. I breathe without trying.”

Think “Sun rays streaming warm and quiet. My abdomen is warm and relaxed, comfortable and relaxed.”

Repeat in its entirety three to four times.