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Recent advance of autogenic training in clinical practice of psychosomatic medicine in Japan

Masato Murakami [a,*], Kazuyoshi Koike [b], Mutsumi Ashihara [c], Toshio Matsuno [a], Mami Tazoe [d], Taisaku Katsura [e]

[a] *Department of Psychosomatic Internal Medicine, Nihon University Itabashi Hospital, Oyaguchikami-cho, Itabashi-ku, Tokyo 175-8610 Japan*
[b] *Dept. of Psychosomatic Dentistry, Nihon University Dental Hospital, Japan*
[c] *Dept. of Psychosomatic Medicine , Chubu Rousai Hospital, Japan*
[d] *Dept. of Pediatrics, Dokkyo University Koshigaya Hospital, Japan*
[e] *LCC Institute on Stress Medicine, Japan*

Abstract. We have focused on several different biological indicators to seek mechanism of autogenic training (AT) and its relationship with self-efficacy. Varieties of physical and psychological phenomena are observed during the process of AT, and these symptoms provide us the important information to understand the mechanism of AT. This study indicates that AT might reduce the patients' anxiety and helps developing the psychotic energy when they need to create self-image and/or self-efficacy. We found out that AT might be effective on the point of "physical change" by improving physiological functions as well as endocrine and immunological functions. The application of AT for children, however, differs from the case for adults. Some problems and questions still remain on the application manners. The idea of AT should be considered differently in the case for children. Group AT was well investigated to see how effectively AT works on the objective observation (mind and body) and helps promoting the eagerness of practicing it through the interaction among the members. We also expect that AT might improve the stress-related psycho-physical condition, therefore a continuous daily application may contribute to the contemporary society in the sense of health promotion as to support people in any stressful situation.

Keywords: Autogenic training (AT); Group autogenic training; Autogenic training for children; Health promotion; Psychosomatic medicine

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +81 80 3 3972 8111; fax: +81 80 3 3972 0015.
E-mail address: mmasato@med.nihon-u.ac.jp (M. Murakami).

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1. Introduction

Autogenic training (AT) is known as one of the major therapeutic tools for treatment of psychosomatic disorder, and it has been used as a tool for relaxation and health promotion. This investigation was conducted to observe the recent topics and advance of AT in clinical practice of psychosomatic medicine in Japan.

2. Understanding the mechanism of AT

We have been investigating the mechanism of the efficacy of AT and have focused on several biological indicators. Varieties of the physical and the psychological phenomena are observed during the process of AT, and these symptoms provide us the important information to understand the mechanism of AT. The result of our investigation will be briefly mentioned.

2.1. Passive concentration of AT

Five subjects who are supposed to be proficient in AT performed 10 min of AT from the first formula to the final sixth formula. Serum ACTH and cortisol tended to increase after 10 min of AT, contrary to the finding of simple relaxation, while noradrenalin decreased similar to simple relaxation. The elevation of cortisol during a short period of AT may be a temporary phenomenon conducted by concentrating their attention to the inner sense of their body. These findings may suggest that relaxation derived by AT is different from simple relaxation. The so-called "passive concentration" which is one of the essential concept of AT may explain the difference in ACTH and cortisol between the 2 groups [1].

2.2. Homeostatic modifications

They showed negative correlation between pre-AT noradrenalin and post-AT ACTH, and also showed negative correlation between pre-AT noradrenalin and post-AT cortisol (Table 1). These findings mean that more excitement in sympathetic nerve before AT conduct suppression of H–P–A axis after AT, and less excitement in sympathetic nerve before AT conduct stimulation of H–P–A axis after AT [1]. These results suggested that AT might contribute to the homeostatic modification according to the condition of the stress.

Table 1
Physiological change during autogenic training – correlation between catecholamine and stress-related substances

	Noradrenaline (pre-AT)
ACTH (pre-AT)	−0.271
ACTH (post-AT)	−0.869**
Cortisol (pre-AT)	−0.309
Cortisol (post-AT)	−0.933*

Data show the negative correlation between pre-AT noradrenalin and post-AT ACTH and the negative correlation between pre-AT noradrenalin and post-AT cortisol.

* $r \geq 0.8$, $p \leq 0.10$.

** $r \geq 0.9$, $p \leq 0.05$.