

What's the alternative?

Autogenic therapy

When Susan Noble, 62, was told she needed to lower her blood pressure, she turned to an unusual technique

I was diagnosed with high blood pressure six years ago, which doctors think I may have inherited from my mum. But other than needing to have my blood pressure checked regularly and taking medication to keep it under control, I was healthy.

Then, four years ago, I suddenly felt a crushing pain in my chest and left arm and was rushed to hospital, where I was told I'd suffered a minor heart attack.

I was given anti-cholesterol and blood-thinning drugs to help prevent a further attack. But a heart scan revealed that one of the arteries in my heart was blocked, and I was also told I'd need to get my blood pressure down even further.

I didn't know how I was going to do that, though, as I exercised three times a week, ate healthily and didn't smoke. Then my friend, Tammy, told me about autogenic therapy. It was invented by a Swiss psychiatrist

who discovered that if patients repeated simple verbal exercises, it reduced symptoms of headaches, fatigue and anxiety by inducing a state of well-being. I was sceptical of how that could help lower my blood pressure but decided to give it a try.

I felt very self-conscious at my first session, where I had to repeat phrases such as, "My arms are feeling heavy, my heartbeat is regular and my lungs are working perfectly." But afterwards, I felt so relaxed, I decided to do a course of eight treatments.

After each one, I felt more and more relaxed, and soon I could make myself calm just by saying the phrases in my head. Most amazing of all, tests showed that my blood pressure dropped dramatically whenever I did the therapy.

Now I repeat the exercises silently to myself several times



Repeating phrases in your head may help reduce blood pressure

a day and my blood pressure is under such good control, I only need to have it checked once a year, compared to every three months.

FURTHER INFORMATION
A one-hour session costs from £40. Call 020 7391 8908, or visit www.autogenic-therapy.org.uk.

THE EVIDENCE

A 2004 *American Heart Journal* study found that autogenic therapy reduced anxiety in heart surgery patients. The *European Journal Of Oncology Nursing* also reported an increased immune system response and lower blood pressure in breast-cancer patients.

A-Z OF PILLS

XENICAL WHAT IS IT?

A weight-loss drug that cuts down the amount of fat your body absorbs from food.

HOW DOES IT WORK?

Enzymes called lipases in your digestive system help to break down fat. Xenical partially blocks this process, and the fat is removed in your bowel movements.

ANY SIDE EFFECTS?

Oily stools and an urgent need to go to the toilet.



I thought my daughter was going deaf

When Kaitlyn was 16 months old, I noticed she didn't always seem to hear me when I spoke to her. Her GP thought it was down to ear infections she'd had in the past. Then, last year, I walked into her bedroom to find her having a fit.

She was rushed to hospital. Her high temperature, caused by a condition called glue ear, had triggered the fit. The specialist explained that Kaitlyn's ear was full of mucus and had become infected.

They said she'd need an operation to insert little tubes called grommets into her middle ear, which would clear her problem.

Within days of the surgery, her hearing had improved. Nine months later, the grommets fell out by themselves. Kaitlyn, who's now three, has been fine ever since. Nicola Proctor, 28, Nottinghamshire



Nicola with daughter Kaitlyn

Kids' health

GLUE EAR EXPLAINED

It's a condition that affects around one in five children and is triggered by an ear infection or heavy cold. If left untreated, glue ear can cause permanent damage.

For further information, visit The National Deaf Children's Society, or call their helpline on 0808 800 8880.