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Self-hypnosis training may help children with Tourette syndrome, study finds

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Children and teens with Tourette syndrome found help for their tics via sessions of self-hypnosis, according to a new study published online Monday in the [Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics](#).

The study included 33 participants ages 6 to 19 who had tic disorders. Tourette syndrome is a neurological disorder that can cause involuntary tics such as coughing, yelling, head jerking and blinking. It's typically treated with medication, which can have mild to severe side effects such as anxiety, weight gain and sluggishness, but new non-drug treatments are showing promise.

Each of the participants took part in self-hypnosis sessions that included watching a video of a boy going through self-hypnosis training and relaxation techniques. Then the child was given some relaxation techniques and instructed to focus on feelings that occurred right before the tic happened, and visualize getting rid of the tic. Study subjects were asked to repeat the exercise at least three times a day as well as keep a calendar of their tic activity.

The study included no control group.

Among the participants, 12 reported a dramatic response in tic control after two visits (plus video training), 13 had those results after three visits, and one after four visits.

During the 2 1/2 months of the study, 79% of the participants said their tic control had improved enough that they were satisfied with the technique. Seven children did not respond to the treatment, four said they felt unmotivated to control their tics, and three were referred to a psychologist or psychiatrist for a more rigorous intervention.

Some similarities exist between self-hypnosis and habit reversal training techniques to reduce tics. Habit reversal training teaches people to become more aware of the urge to tic, then has them engage in a behavior that competes with the tick, such as rhythmic breathing.

In a study published last May in the [Journal of the American Medical Assn.](#), habit reversal training significantly improved ticking in 53% of children, compared with 19% of children in a control group who received support therapy and education.

In this study, the authors wrote: "Whether [self-hypnosis] will turn out to be a more cost-effective alternative to [habit reversal training], with its longer training period, is still an open question. Like HR, SH has an advantage over medication management of tics because it is safe and free of side effects, especially attractive for a disorder with a favorable natural history. There may be some intangibles distinguishing the techniques ... but these are not easily translated into a putative advantage or disadvantage for either technique."