

MEDICAL STUDIES**THERAPY:** FLOATION THERAPY**CONDITION:** Relaxation / Anxiety Relief**ARTICLE LINK:** <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29656950/>

The Elicitation of Relaxation and Interoceptive Awareness Using Floatation Therapy in Individuals With High Anxiety Sensitivity

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ABSTRACT

Background: Floatation-REST (Reduced Environmental Stimulation Therapy), an intervention that attenuates exteroceptive sensory input to the nervous system, has recently been found to reduce state anxiety across a diverse clinical sample with high levels of anxiety sensitivity (AS). To further examine this anxiolytic effect, the present study investigated the affective and physiological changes induced by Floatation-REST and assessed whether individuals with high AS experienced any alterations in their awareness for interoceptive sensation while immersed in an environment lacking exteroceptive sensation.

Methods: Using a within-subject crossover design, 31 participants with high AS were randomly assigned to undergo a 90-minute session of Floatation-REST or an exteroceptive comparison condition. Measures of self-reported affect and interoceptive awareness were collected before and after each session, and blood pressure was measured during each session.

Results: Relative to the comparison condition, Floatation-REST generated a significant anxiolytic effect characterized by reductions in state anxiety and muscle tension and increases in feelings of relaxation and serenity ($p < .001$ for all variables). Significant blood pressure reductions were evident throughout the float session and reached the lowest point during the diastole phase (average reduction >12 mm Hg). The float environment also significantly enhanced awareness and attention for cardiorespiratory sensations.

Conclusions: Floatation-REST induced a state of relaxation and heightened interoceptive awareness in a clinical sample with high AS. The paradoxical nature of the anxiolytic effect in this sample is discussed in relation to Wolpe's theory of reciprocal inhibition and the regulation of distress via sustained attention to present moment visceral sensations such as the breath.

Keywords: Anxiety; Blood pressure; Floatation-REST; Floating; Interoception; Mindfulness; Novel intervention; Relaxation response.

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