

What role does ECT play in the stress response?

Dr. Northoff:

Body and brain are closely related to each other, and the brain continuously adapts itself to the input from the body, like with the respiration of the heart. So it's really in alignment, and the same the brain does, with respect to external stimuli, like when you listen to music — your brain continuously adapts its own inner rhythm to the rhythm of the music. So what do you do? You tap the music, and you move to the beat of the music, and even more important, you feel terribly good with that! You become part of the music, and you might even have a flow experience. Many musicians tell you that. And all that seems to be lost. That capacity is lost. For instance, in catatonia, they're not reactive at all because they don't move at all anymore. And on the extreme, they're completely disconnected.

And it seems that through synchronization, the brain can be rebooted. That probably makes it possible then over many sessions, 15, 10, 20 ECT sessions, basically that the brain becomes again responsive and can align or synchronize itself with the environmental context and with your own body. And that's what makes you feel better.