

How can we prevent the overwhelm leading to catatonia?

Dr. Northoff:

Patients, whom I said, “Okay, always take a little lorazepam when you have the feeling you get overwhelmed.” And ideally, we develop psychological mechanisms. For instance, we develop here personalized breathing therapy for people with anxiety, where we tailor the individual breathing rate according to the psychological and neuronal features of the patient. And this is amazing. For instance, one of my severe anxiety patients — she's an engineer, and she has social anxiety, and she's always afraid. She had one catatonic episode as part of that social anxiety, and she's always very afraid in public talks. She's a brilliant engineer. It's unbelievable how brilliant she is, but she's very afraid of public talks.

So now I said, “Each time before you give the talk, you go to the restroom, do two minutes of your personalized, customized breathing protocol,” and it helps. So these kind of little psychological things, so non-pharmacological therapies with immediate efficacy we can give, for instance, for prevention. And I could imagine doing a similar thing for catatonia.

We do also develop customized personalized music therapy for patients with depression, so the advantage of these non-pharmacological therapies is that they have low side effects. If used properly, you can use them. That immediate efficacy, it's amazing.