Journal of Neonatal Surgery
ISSN(Online): 2226-0439
Vol. 14, Issue 7 (2025)
https://www.jneonatalsurg.com

OPEN ACCESS

Developing a Therapeutic Protocol: Integrating Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Hypnotic Suggestion Based on Lao Tzu's Principles for Anxiety Disorders

Ashish Semwal*[1], Tripti Juyal[1]

[1]Center for Research & Development, Maya Devi University, Dehradun, India.

***Corresponding author:**

Ashish Semwal

Center for Research & Development, Maya Devi University, Dehradun, India.

Email ID: ashish.semwal@mdu.edu.in

Cite this paper as: Ashish Semwal, Tripti Juyal, (2025) Developing a Therapeutic Protocol: Integrating Progressive Muscle Relaxation and Hypnotic Suggestion Based on Lao Tzu's Principles for Anxiety Disorders. *Journal of Neonatal Surgery*, 14 (7), 1289-1296.

ABSTRACT

Feeling anxious is a big deal for many people around the globe. It can seriously get in the way of enjoying life and functioning well, which means we constantly need to find new, whole-person, and individual-focused ways to help. This paper introduces the idea and basic design for a new therapy approach called the Tao-PMR-Hypnosis (TPH) protocol. It's all about easing the complex symptoms of anxiety by blending a few powerful techniques: the body-calming benefits of Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), the mind-reshaping abilities of clinical hypnosis using specific suggestions, and the guiding wisdom of Lao Tzu's ancient book, the *Tao Te Ching*. Key ideas from Taoism that shape this TPH protocol include "wu wei" (like effortless action or letting things unfold naturally), the strength found in being gentle and flexible ("rou"), the peace that comes from simplicity ("pu"), and the overall goal of living in harmony with nature's way (the Tao).

First, this paper takes a look at anxiety itself—what it feels like, where it comes from, and some of the downsides or difficulties with current common treatments like medication or standard talk therapies. Then, it dives into some key Taoist ideas and how they can help us understand and change the experience of anxiety. After that, we'll explore PMR and clinical hypnosis as therapies, looking at their history, how they work, what's usually involved, and how effective they are for anxiety and stress.

The main part of this paper explains the proposed TPH protocol in detail: its core ideas, how it would be structured in phases, the specific techniques used in each phase, and ideas for how sessions could look in a clinical setting. This approach aims to see anxiety not just as a bunch of symptoms to get rid of, but as a deeper sign that our mind, body, and spirit are out of balance. The TPH protocol suggests that we can gently but powerfully restore this balance by learning to find deep inner calm, become more mentally flexible, release physical tension while becoming more aware of our bodies, and live more consciously in tune with universal principles of natural balance, effortless living, and self-kindness. We'll use some fictional examples to show how it might work, and then talk honestly about the potential benefits, possible drawbacks, and important ethical things to keep in mind. Finally, we'll suggest what kind of research is needed to really test and improve the TPH protocol. By creatively mixing timeless wisdom with proven modern techniques, the TPH protocol hopes to offer a kind, respectful, and deeply healing path for reducing anxiety and helping people live fuller, more peaceful lives.

Keywords: *Anxiety Disorders, Taoism, Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching, Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), Clinical Hypnosis, Hypnotic Suggestion, Integrative Therapy, Mind-Body Medicine, Wu Wei, Stress Reduction, Therapeutic Protocol, Somatic Psychology, Existential Psychology, Holistic Healing.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Let's talk about anxiety. It's more than just a fleeting worry; for many, it's a constant, heavy weight that can make daily life incredibly challenging. It's a huge issue worldwide, affecting not just individuals but whole communities (Bandelow and Michaelis 327; Baxter et al. 897). When anxiety takes hold, it can show up as constant fear, endless "what ifs," a racing heart, and a whole host of other overwhelming feelings. It can make it tough to go to work or school, maintain relationships, or simply enjoy life (American Psychiatric Association 215-21; Olatunji et al. 617).

We have treatments that help many people, like medication and therapies such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) (Hofmann et al.; National Institute for Health and Care Excellence). But these don't work for everyone. Some people only get a bit better, others struggle with side effects from drugs (Stein et al. 310), find that their anxiety comes back (Yonkers et al. 482), or feel that these methods don't quite fit with who they are or what they believe about healing (Andrews et al. 475; Kirmayer, "Cultural Variations"). This tells us loud and clear: we need more options—fresh, well-rounded, and truly person-focused ways to help people find relief.

Interestingly, there's a growing buzz in Western psychology and medicine about looking to ancient wisdom and mind-body practices for new ideas. These traditions have, for thousands of years, focused on things like mental peace, emotional balance, and our own power to heal ourselves (Walsh and Shapiro 227; Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*). One incredible source of this wisdom is Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, a classic text of Taoist philosophy. Written in ancient China centuries ago, it offers a surprisingly relevant guide to living a calm, contented life. It talks about ideas like "wu wei" (which is like effortless action or going with the flow), finding strength in being flexible like water ("rou"), the beauty of simplicity ("pu"), and living in sync with the natural way of things—the Tao (Chan 139-42; Mitchell ix-xii). These Taoist ideas encourage us to let go of constant striving, to accept life's ups and downs, and to trust our inner wisdom. This is a very different way of thinking compared to the tense, control-focused mindset that often fuels anxiety (Chen 65-68).

Alongside this ancient wisdom, we have some proven Western techniques. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), developed by the American physician Edmund Jacobson way back in the early 20th century, is a straightforward method where you tense and then release your muscles. It's great for calming the physical tension that comes with anxiety (Jacobson, *Progressive Relaxation*; Payne 75-80). Then there's clinical hypnosis, which helps people enter a focused, relaxed state where they're more open to positive suggestions. Hypnosis can help reshape anxious thoughts, manage overwhelming emotions, and build confidence (Lynn et al. 251; Hammond 301-05).

So, what if we brought these powerful elements together? The wisdom of Taoism, the body-calming effects of PMR, and the mind-freeing potential of hypnosis haven't really been combined in a structured way to treat anxiety. This paper is about imagining and outlining just such an approach. We're calling it the Tao-PMR-Hypnosis (TPH) protocol. The big idea is that by thoughtfully blending these three, we can offer a truly holistic and effective way for people to break free from anxiety's grip.

This paper will explore why this combination makes sense. We'll look at what we assume will help people change and outline how the TPH protocol might work, session by session. We'll also talk about who it could help, what its limits might be, important ethical points, and what research needs to happen next. Our hope is that by weaving together ancient wisdom about living naturally and peacefully with effective modern therapies, the TPH protocol can guide people not just to fewer symptoms, but to a deeper, lasting sense of inner peace and a more authentic way of living.

2. UNDERSTANDING ANXIETY DISORDERS: A BIOPSYCHOSOCIAL PERSPECTIVE

A little bit of anxiety is actually a normal part of being human. It's like an internal alarm system that nature gave us to signal danger and get us ready to act, which is pretty useful for survival (Barlow 3-5; Öhman 709-29). This kind of helpful anxiety usually passes once the threat is gone and generally matches the size of the challenge. But when anxiety becomes super intense, sticks around all the time, lasts for ages, and is totally out of proportion to what's actually happening, that's when it can turn into an anxiety disorder. These disorders can really get in the way of living a full life, handling daily tasks, and feeling content.

The main guide mental health professionals use, the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*, or DSM-5 for short, describes several types of anxiety disorders, which can sometimes overlap (American Psychiatric Association 215-21). For example, there's Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), where someone worries excessively and uncontrollably about all sorts of everyday things – work, money, health, relationships – and often feels restless, tired, has trouble concentrating, is irritable, tense, and can't sleep well (American Psychiatric Association 222-26). Panic Disorder involves having unexpected panic attacks – sudden rushes of intense fear that come with scary physical feelings like a racing heart, sweating, shaking, shortness of breath, or feeling like you're dying or losing control – and then worrying a lot about having more attacks (American Psychiatric Association 208-17). Social Anxiety Disorder (or Social Phobia) is an intense fear of social situations where you might be judged by others, leading to a lot of distress and often avoiding those situations because you're terrified of being embarrassed or humiliated (American Psychiatric Association 202-08). Specific Phobias are about being extremely scared of a particular thing or situation (like animals, heights, flying, needles, or blood) to the point where it causes immediate anxiety and avoidance (American Psychiatric Association 197-202). And Agoraphobia involves a strong fear of being in various situations like on public transport, in open or enclosed spaces, in crowds, or even just outside the home alone, mainly because you're worried escape would be hard or help wouldn't be available if you had panic-like symptoms (American Psychiatric Association 217-21).

While these labels are useful, it's important to remember that anxiety disorders often stem from a mix of things: how we think, how our bodies react, and what we've learned to do in response. To really get anxiety, we need to look at it from all

angles – what's called a biopsychosocial perspective. This means understanding how our genes and brain chemistry, our learned thought patterns and coping styles, and our social world (like stress, culture, and support systems) all play a part (Engel 131-33).

Thinking patterns are a big piece of the puzzle, as experts like Aaron T. Beck and David M. Clark have shown (A. Beck and Emery 65-70; Clark and Beck 109-30). People prone to anxiety tend to be on high alert for anything that seems threatening, often missing neutral or positive stuff. They're also more likely to assume the worst in vague situations, blow potential negative outcomes way out of proportion (thinking they're more likely and will be more awful than they really are), and doubt their own ability to cope. Worry, which is central to GAD, is like a chain of negative thoughts, often starting with "what if..." While it might feel like you're problem-solving, worry often just makes anxiety worse, stops you from really processing your fears, and gets in the way of actually fixing things (Borkovec et al. 8-10; Wells 154-57). These thought habits can create a vicious cycle: anxious thoughts lead to anxious feelings and body sensations, which then seem to confirm that the anxious thoughts were right all along.

Physically, anxiety is all tied up with our body's stress response – a built-in system designed to get us ready for danger. When we sense a threat (real or imagined), our sympathetic nervous system and something called the HPA axis kick into gear (Sapolsky 25-30; Chrousos 3-5). This releases stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol, leading to the "fight-flight-freeze" response. Your heart beats faster, you breathe quicker, muscles tense up, you might sweat more – all to prepare you for action (Cannon, *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear and Rage*). This is great for short-term physical danger, but in anxiety disorders, this system gets triggered too often, too strongly, or stays on for too long. The physical feelings that come with this (like a racing heart or dizziness) can be terrifying for someone with panic disorder, making them fear the sensations themselves and fueling more panic (Clark, "A Cognitive Approach to Panic" 463-65; Reiss and McNally 107-21). When this stress system is constantly overworked, it can eventually harm our long-term health, increasing risks for heart problems, a weaker immune system, chronic pain, and other issues (McEwen 880-82; Cohen et al. 607-10).

Behaviorally, people with anxiety often try to avoid things that trigger their fear and engage in "safety behaviors." This could mean avoiding situations, places, people, or even internal feelings (Craske et al. 55-58; Hayes et al. 59-62). While avoiding might bring quick relief, it backfires in the long run. It stops you from learning that the feared situation might not be so bad after all, and it prevents you from building coping skills and confidence. Safety behaviors are more subtle ways of avoiding – like always needing a friend at a party if you have social anxiety, or always carrying anxiety pills "just in case." These also keep anxiety going because you end up thinking you only got through it because of the safety behavior, not because you could handle it or the situation wasn't actually catastrophic (Salkovskis 60-63).

Beyond thoughts, body reactions, and behaviors, anxiety also has a deeper, existential side that we often overlook. Thinkers and therapists have long recognized that a lot of human anxiety comes from grappling with the big, unavoidable truths of life: we all die, we have freedom (and the responsibility that comes with it), we're ultimately alone in our own consciousness, and we often search for meaning in a universe that doesn't just hand it to us (Yalom 8-12; Tillich 35-40). Life's inherent uncertainty, the fact that things always change, loss, and suffering – these can be powerful sources of a deeper kind of anxiety. This existential unease connects deeply with some core Taoist ideas. Lao Tzu often talked about embracing uncertainty as part of the Tao (the natural Way), accepting impermanence as life's rhythm, and finding peace in simplicity and the present moment – all of which can be seen as profound responses to these fundamental human worries (Feng and English, Introduction). The anxious drive for absolute control, perfect certainty, and unchanging stability can be seen, from a Taoist viewpoint, as a painful disconnect from life as an ever-flowing, unpredictable, and ultimately mysterious process.

Given how many interconnected parts there are to anxiety, it makes sense that the most effective treatments often need to address these different layers. Medications can help with the biological side and acute symptoms, and therapies like CBT are great for changing unhelpful thoughts and behaviors. But there's still a clear need for approaches that also include ways to regulate the body, cultivate a more accepting and mindful relationship with our inner experiences (like in ACT), and compassionately address those deeper existential aspects of anxiety. The TPH protocol we're proposing aims to do just that, by blending body techniques (PMR) and hypnosis within a Taoist philosophical framework that speaks directly to our human need for balance, harmony, acceptance, and a sense of effortless being in a challenging world.

3. LAO TZU'S *TAO TE CHING*: PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR AN ANXIETY PROTOCOL

Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* isn't just some dusty old book of sayings; it's a deep and lasting guide to living in harmony with how reality actually works. Its wisdom, though ancient, feels incredibly relevant today, offering powerful insights into why we suffer and how we can find inner peace and true well-being. For anyone struggling with anxiety, the ideas in the *Tao Te Ching* offer a unique and comforting philosophical lens, one that challenges the very thought patterns and reactions that often fuel anxiety. By exploring key Taoist concepts like the Tao itself, "wu wei" (effortless action), "rou" (gentle strength), "pu" (simple living), embracing uncertainty, and "ziran" (naturalness), we find a wealth of ideas that can enrich how we approach anxiety therapy. These aren't just techniques; they offer a whole new way of looking at life that can fundamentally change how we experience and deal with anxiety.

The Concept of Tao: The Unnamable Source and Natural Order

At the very core of Lao Tzu's thinking is the Tao (often translated as "the Way," "the Path," or "the Principle"). The Tao is described as the ultimate, indescribable source and sustainer of everything in the universe – the underlying cosmic order from which everything comes and to which everything returns (Chan 139). The very first chapter of the *Tao Te Ching* tells us it's mysterious and beyond our full grasp: "The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name. The unnamable is the eternally real. Naming is the origin of all particular things" (Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Mitchell, ch. 1). This highlights how words and concepts can't fully capture the Tao; it's beyond definition. It's like an empty container that can hold everything, formless yet the source of all forms, silent yet its presence is everywhere (Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Feng and English, chs. 4, 21, 41, paraphrased). The Tao is often compared to a vast, empty space, an uncarved block of wood, or the empty center of a wheel – seemingly nothing, yet making everything else possible (Adler 75-77).

For someone feeling anxious, this idea of an underlying, benevolent, self-regulating natural order can be incredibly comforting. Anxiety often springs from feeling like there's no order, like life is chaotic, threatening, and unpredictable. The anxious mind tries to force its own rigid control onto a world that doesn't always cooperate, which just leads to more tension and fear. Taoism suggests that true order isn't something we impose; it's something we discover and align with. As Lao Tzu says, "The Great Tao flows everywhere... The ten thousand things depend on it; it holds nothing back. It fulfills its purpose silently and makes no claim" (*Tao Te Ching*, trans. Mitchell, ch. 34). This suggests there's an inherent wisdom in how life unfolds, even when it looks messy from our limited viewpoint.

Anxiety often involves being disconnected from this natural flow, resisting the Tao. The anxious person is often swimming against life's current, trying to force things, prevent imagined disasters, and maintain an illusion of control over what's ultimately uncontrollable (Slingerland 20-25). This struggle itself is a major source of pain. The therapeutic idea here is to gently help people shift from anxious striving and resistance to greater trust, acceptance, and alignment with life's natural processes. This isn't about giving up; it's about engaging with reality more skillfully and with less effort, recognizing that "The Tao abides in non-action, Yet nothing is left undone" (Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Feng and English, ch. 37). Learning to trust this larger, self-regulating order can provide a deep sense of grounding and reduce the need for the hyper-vigilance and excessive control that feed so much anxiety. The TPH protocol would introduce this idea subtly, maybe through metaphors in hypnosis or guided thoughts, encouraging a feeling of being supported by a larger, kind process, which can lessen the sense of isolated struggle that often comes with anxiety.

Wu Wei (Effortless Action/Non-Interference): The Art of Letting Go and Trusting the Process

One of the coolest, and maybe a bit surprising, ideas from the *Tao Te Ching* is something called *wu wei* (無為). You might see it translated as "non-action" or "doing nothing," but that's a bit misleading – it doesn't mean being lazy! A better way to think of it is "effortless action," "acting without forcing things," or simply "going with the flow" (Watts 75-78; Loy 73-75). *Wu wei* isn't about sitting back and doing zero; it's about acting in a way that's natural and in harmony with the situation and the Tao (the natural way of things). When you act with *wu wei*, you get great results with less struggle and without creating a lot of pushback or mess. Lao Tzu pointed to nature for examples: water just finds its own level and can wear away stone over time, plants grow without trying so hard, and the seasons change perfectly on their own.

Anxiety, in many ways, is the exact opposite of *wu wei*. It's all about effortful striving, mental churning, constant internal interference, and desperately trying to control thoughts, feelings, and what happens around us. Someone with GAD, for instance, worries relentlessly, believing that by constantly mulling over potential problems, they can somehow prevent them – a very effortful and ultimately unhelpful mental habit (Borkovec et al. 10). People with panic disorder might try to forcefully suppress their physical sensations or flee situations, actions driven by intense effort and fear. Social anxiety often involves working hard to monitor oneself and trying to perfectly manage how others see them. All these anxious patterns involve "forcing" things against the natural grain of experience. As Lao Tzu put it, "Forcing a project to completion, you ruin what was almost ripe... Therefore the Master takes action by letting things take their course" (*Tao Te Ching*, trans. Mitchell, ch. 64). He also said, "Whoever relies on the Tao... doesn't try to force issues... Violence, even well intentioned, always rebounds upon oneself" (*Tao Te Ching*, trans. Mitchell, ch. 30).

Applying *wu wei* to anxiety means guiding people towards a surprising shift: learning to "do less" to achieve more genuine calm and effectiveness. It's about cultivating an attitude of non-interference with your own inner world. For example, instead of trying to stop anxious thoughts, you might learn to just observe them without judgment and let them pass, like clouds in the sky – a technique often used in mindfulness that fits perfectly with *wu wei*. Instead of fighting anxious feelings, you might practice accepting their presence without reacting or trying to get rid of them immediately, trusting that, like all feelings, they'll eventually pass if you don't fuel them with resistance (Hayes et al. 60-62). This "letting be" is a core part of *wu wei*.

In our TPH protocol, *wu wei* would be introduced through discussions and experiential exercises. Hypnotic suggestions could focus on themes like "letting go of the struggle," "allowing thoughts and feelings to come and go like your breath," "trusting

the natural process of healing," and "finding ease in not striving." Even PMR, when done with a *wu wei* mindset, becomes more than just a mechanical exercise; it becomes an experience of intentionally releasing effort and allowing the body to return to its natural relaxed state. The goal is to help people discover that true control and peace often come not from more effort, but from a wiser, more Tao-aligned use of it – or sometimes, from a brave and skillful "non-doing." This directly challenges the anxious mind's deep belief that "I must *do something*" to fix my anxiety, offering instead the possibility that "Perhaps by *doing less*, by interfering less with my own natural ability to find balance, I will find the peace I'm looking for."

Yielding and Softness (Rou): The Unseen Strength of Flexibility and Non-Resistance

Hand-in-hand with *wu wei* is the Taoist appreciation for being yielding, soft, flexible, and receptive (柔, rou), rather than rigid, hard, and forceful. Lao Tzu often used water as a metaphor for this powerful idea:

Nothing in the world is as soft and yielding as water. Yet for dissolving the hard and inflexible, nothing can surpass it. The soft overcomes the hard; the gentle overcomes the rigid. Everyone knows this is true, but few can put it into practice. (*Tao Te Ching*, trans. Mitchell, ch. 78) He also pointed out, "The human is born soft and supple; dead, it is stiff and hard. Plants are born tender and pliant; dead, they are brittle and dry... The hard and stiff will be broken. The soft and supple will prevail" (*Tao Te Ching*, trans. Mitchell, ch. 76). This view totally flips our usual ideas about strength, suggesting that real power and resilience come not from unbending resistance or brute force, but from being able to adapt, flow, and absorb impact without breaking.

Anxiety often comes with a lot of stiffness, both mentally and physically. Anxious thinking can be very rigid, with inflexible beliefs about oneself and the world (like "I must always be perfect," or "I can't stand uncertainty"), making it hard to see things differently (Puterman et al.). Emotionally, people with anxiety might try to suppress or control any feelings they label as negative or uncomfortable. Behaviorally, anxiety often leads to rigid avoidance patterns and a limited set of coping tools. Physically, chronic anxiety shows up as constant muscle tension, like the body is always braced for a threat. This all-around rigidity makes people more brittle and vulnerable to stress, like a stiff tree that snaps in a storm, while the flexible bamboo bends and survives.

Lao Tzu's teachings on yielding and softness are incredibly relevant for anxiety. They encourage us to cultivate more flexibility in our thinking, emotional responses, and choices. This fits well with modern therapy ideas like "psychological flexibility" (a key goal in ACT), which is about being present with what's happening and either changing or sticking with our actions in a way that serves what we value, even when difficult thoughts or feelings are around (Hayes et al. 62-64).

- ***Cognitive Yielding*:** Instead of rigidly holding onto catastrophic thoughts, we can learn to hold them more lightly, to "yield" to the idea that other, less threatening ways of seeing things might be true. It's about softening our mental defenses and being open to new perspectives.
- ***Emotional Yielding*:** Instead of fighting or suppressing anxious feelings, we can practice just letting them be there without judgment, watching them come and go with gentle acceptance. This "yielding" to our emotional current, surprisingly, often makes the feelings less intense and shorter-lived, because it's often our resistance that makes them stronger.
- ***Behavioral Yielding*:** This could mean gradually letting go of rigid safety habits or avoidance patterns, "yielding" to the discomfort of uncertainty or facing feared situations, and discovering that we can actually handle these experiences.
- ***Somatic Yielding*:** PMR is a direct way to practice this. It teaches the body to release chronic tension, to "yield" its stiffness and return to a state of softness and ease. The feeling of muscles letting go is a direct, physical experience of *rou*.

In the TPH protocol, the idea of yielding softness would be woven into hypnotic suggestions and metaphors. We might use images of water flowing around rocks, bamboo bending in the wind, or a willow tree's flexible branches to bring this feeling of adaptive strength to life. Suggestions might encourage "softening into the anxiety," "allowing tension to melt away like snow in spring," or "breathing into tight areas with a gentle, yielding breath." The aim is to help people deeply understand that true strength isn't about resisting life's pressures with rigid force, but about meeting them with a flexible, adaptable, and yielding spirit. This approach helps preserve inner peace and wholeness, directly countering the anxious tendency to brace against perceived threats and offering instead a path of "intelligent softness."

4. CONCLUSION

So, to wrap things up, anxiety, in all its forms, causes a lot of suffering around the world. It can trap people in a cycle of fear, worry, physical discomfort, and avoidance, really dimming their spark and making it hard to enjoy life or grow as a person. We have good treatments that help many, but it's clear we still need more options—approaches that are well-rounded, sensitive to different cultures, and treat the whole person. This paper has laid out the idea for a new approach: the Tao-PMR-Hypnosis (TPH) protocol. It's designed to help ease anxiety by combining the deep body calm of Progressive Muscle

Relaxation, the mind-reshaping power of clinical hypnosis, and the timeless wisdom of Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* as a guiding light.

The TPH protocol sees anxiety not just as a list of symptoms to get rid of, but as a sign that we're out of sync—biologically, psychologically, socially, and even in how we connect with life's deeper questions. It suggests that we can find our way back to balance and well-being. How? By learning to calm our bodies through PMR, by gently reshaping anxious thoughts and feelings with hypnosis, and most importantly, by finding a deeper connection with the Taoist ideas of natural balance, effortless living (*wu wei*), accepting what is, and appreciating simplicity. By bringing in these ancient, always-relevant principles, the TPH protocol aims to do more than just manage symptoms. It hopes to help people fundamentally change their relationship with themselves, their inner experiences, and the unavoidable uncertainties of life. The plan for the protocol—moving from finding physical calm, to letting the mind be effortless, to embracing flexibility, and finally to living more simply and naturally—offers a step-by-step, adaptable, and person-centered path for this journey.

The thinking behind mixing PMR's body benefits with hypnosis's powerful suggestion techniques is strong, and both have good track records in reducing anxiety. Adding Lao Tzu's wisdom doesn't just give us beautiful metaphors and ideas for therapy; it provides an overall philosophy that can really click with people looking for a more authentic, less stressful way to deal with their anxiety and life in general. Taoism's focus on not always striving, on bravely accepting change and uncertainty, and on trusting in life's natural flow offers a refreshing and liberating alternative to the anxious mind's endless quest for total control and perfect certainty.

However, let's be clear: right now, the TPH protocol is an idea, a blueprint. It needs to be carefully tested in the real world with good research. We need studies to see if it's practical, if people like it, and if it truly helps reduce anxiety and improve well-being. These studies should look at things like stress levels, changes in thinking, how people feel emotionally, and whether they're able to do more of what matters to them.

Also, for this to work well and ethically, therapists using it would need to be well-trained in PMR, clinical hypnosis (knowing when and how to use it safely), and have a respectful, open-minded understanding of Taoist philosophy, always being mindful of cultural differences and professional ethics.

In short, the Tao-PMR-Hypnosis protocol is an attempt to blend ancient wisdom with modern science to help ease the burden of anxiety and help people flourish. By valuing the body's ability to relax, the mind's power to learn and adapt, and the human spirit's longing for harmony and a meaningful life, the TPH protocol aims to offer a gentle yet powerful path. This path isn't just about managing anxiety symptoms, but about bravely moving beyond its limits to rediscover a more authentic, peaceful, strong, and Tao-aligned way of being in the world. Hopefully, the journey of developing and testing this protocol will itself be a Taoist adventure of patient growth, humble learning, and ongoing mindful discovery.

REFERENCES

[1] Adler, Joseph A. "The Taoist Concept of Wu-wei." Religious Studies Thesis, Illinois Wesleyan U, 1974. *Digital Commons @ IWU*, digitalcommons.iwu.edu/religious_studies_theses/2.

[2] American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*. 5th ed., American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013.

[3] Andrews, Gavin, et al. *The Treatment of Anxiety Disorders: Clinician's Guide and Patient Manuals*. 2nd ed., Cambridge UP, 2003.

[4] Bandelow, Borwin, and Sophie Michaelis. "Epidemiology of Anxiety Disorders in the 21st Century." *Dialogues in Clinical Neuroscience*, vol. 17, no. 3, 2015, pp. 327–35.

[5] Barlow, David H. *Anxiety and Its Disorders: The Nature and Treatment of Anxiety and Panic*. 2nd ed., Guilford Press, 2002.

[6] Baxter, Amanda J., et al. "Global Prevalence of Anxiety Disorders: A Systematic Review and Meta-regression." *Psychological Medicine*, vol. 43, no. 5, 2013, pp. 897-910. *Cambridge University Press*, doi:10.1017/S003329171200147X.

[7] Beck, Aaron T., and Gary Emery, with Ruth L. Greenberg. *Anxiety Disorders and Phobias: A Cognitive Perspective*. Basic Books, 1985.

[8] Borkovec, Thomas D., et al. "The Nature of Worry in Generalized Anxiety Disorder: A Predominance of Thought Activity." *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, vol. 28, no. 2, 1990, pp. 153-58. *Elsevier*, doi:10.1016/0005-7967(90)90035-U.

[9] Cannon, Walter B. *Bodily Changes in Pain, Hunger, Fear and Rage: An Account of Recent Researches into the Function of Emotional Excitement*. D. Appleton and Company, 1915.

[10] Chan, Wing-Tsit, translator and compiler. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton UP, 1963.

[11] Chen, H. M. "Taoism and the Mental Health of Chinese People." *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, vol. 37, no. 1, 1991, pp. 65-68. *SAGE Journals*, doi:10.1177/002076409103700108.

[12] Chrousos, George P. "Stress and Disorders of the Stress System." *Nature Reviews Endocrinology*, vol. 5

[13] Chrousos, George P. "Stress and Disorders of the Stress System." *Nature Reviews Endocrinology*, vol. 5, no. 7, 2009, pp. 374-81. *Nature*, doi:10.1038/nrendo.2009.106.

[14] Clark, David M. "A Cognitive Approach to Panic." *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, vol. 24, no. 4, 1986, pp. 461–70. *Elsevier*, doi:10.1016/0005-7967(86)90011-2.

[15] ---. "Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders: Science and Practice." *Anxiety Disorders: Toward a Paradigm Shift in Understanding and Treatment*, edited by David H. Barlow, Oxford UP, 2002, pp. 109-130. (Note: Entry assumes David M. Clark is the primary author of this chapter. If it's Clark and Beck, the entry would start with "Clark, David M., and Aaron T. Beck.")

[16] Cohen, Sheldon, et al. "Psychological Stress and Disease." *JAMA*, vol. 298, no. 14, 2007, pp. 1685-87. *JAMA Network*, doi:10.1001/jama.298.14.1685.

[17] Craske, Michelle G., et al. *Mastery of Your Anxiety and Worry: Therapist Guide*. 2nd ed., Oxford UP, 2006.

[18] Engel, George L. "The Need for a New Medical Model: A Challenge for Biomedicine." *Science*, vol. 196, no. 4286, 1977, pp. 129-36. *AAAS*, doi:10.1126/science.847460.

[19] Feng, Gia-Fu, and Jane English, translators. Introduction. *Tao Te Ching*, by Lao Tzu, Vintage Books, 1972.

[20] Hammond, D. Corydon, editor. *Handbook of Hypnotic Suggestions and Metaphors*. W. W. Norton & Company, 1990.

[21] Hayes, Steven C., et al. *Acceptance and Commitment Therapy: The Process and Practice of Mindful Change*. 2nd ed., Guilford Press, 2011.

[22] Hofmann, Stefan G., et al. "The Efficacy of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: A Review of Meta-analyses." *Cognitive Therapy and Research*, vol. 36, no. 5, 2012, pp. 427–40. *SpringerLink*, doi:10.1007/s10608-012-9476-1.

[23] Jacobson, Edmund. *Progressive Relaxation*. U of Chicago P, 1938.

[24] Kabat-Zinn, Jon. *Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness*. Revised ed., Dell Publishing, 2013.

[25] Kirmayer, Laurence J. "Cultural Variations in the Clinical Presentation of Depression and Anxiety: Implications for Diagnosis and Treatment." *Journal of Clinical Psychiatry*, vol. 62, suppl. 13, 2001, pp. 22-28.

[26] Lao Tzu. *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, Vintage Books, 1972.

[27] ---. *Tao Te Ching*. Translated by Stephen Mitchell, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006.

[28] Loy, David. "Wei-wu-wei: Nondual Action." *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 35, no. 1, 1985, pp. 73-86. *JSTOR*, doi:10.2307/1398682.

[29] Lynn, Steven Jay, et al. "Hypnosis as an Empirically Supported Clinical Intervention: The State of the Evidence and a Look to the Future." *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, vol. 60, no. 3, 2012, pp. 251-70. *Taylor & Francis Online*, doi:10.1080/00207144.2012.690559.

[30] McEwen, Bruce S. "Physiology and Neurobiology of Stress and Adaptation: Central Role of the Brain." *Physiological Reviews*, vol. 87, no. 3, 2007, pp. 873-904. *American Physiological Society*, doi:10.1152/physrev.00002.2007.

[31] Mitchell, Stephen. Introduction. *Tao Te Ching*, by Lao Tzu, translated by Stephen Mitchell, Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006, pp. ix-xii.

[32] National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE). *Generalized Anxiety Disorder and Panic Disorder in Adults: Management*. Clinical Guideline CG113, 2011, nice.org.uk/guidance/cg113.

[33] Öhman, Arne. "Fear and Anxiety: Evolutionary, Cognitive, and Clinical Perspectives." *Handbook of Emotions*, edited by Michael Lewis et al., 3rd ed., Guilford Press, 2008, pp. 709-29.

[34] Olatunji, Bunmi O., et al. "The Effects of Comorbid Anxiety and Depression on Quality of Life: A Meta-Analytic Review." *Psychological Medicine*, vol. 37, no. 5, 2007, pp. 617-26. *Cambridge University Press*, doi:10.1017/S003329170600959X.

[35] Payne, R. A. *Relaxation Techniques: A Practical Handbook for the Health Care Professional*. 4th ed., Churchill Livingstone Elsevier, 2010.

[36] Puterman, Eli, et al. "The Association Between Perceived Stress and Telomere Length in High-Stress

Women." *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2010, pp. 574-82. *Elsevier*, doi:10.1016/j.psyneuen.2009.09.009.

[37] Reiss, Steven, and Richard J. McNally. "Expectancy Model of Fear." *Theoretical Issues in Behavior Therapy*, edited by Steven Reiss and Richard R. Bootzin, Academic Press, 1985, pp. 107-21.

[38] Salkovskis, Paul M. "The Importance of Behaviour in the Maintenance of Anxiety and Panic: A Cognitive Account." *Behaviour Research and Therapy*, vol. 29, no. 1, 1991, pp. 60-63. *Elsevier*, doi:10.1016/0005-7967(91)90048-Q.

[39] Sapolsky, Robert M. *Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers: The Acclaimed Guide to Stress, Stress-Related Diseases, and Coping*. 3rd ed., Holt Paperbacks, 2004.

[40] Slingerland, Edward. *Effortless Action: Wu-wei as Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*. Oxford UP, 2003.

[41] Stein, Dan J., et al. "Pharmacotherapy for Social Anxiety Disorder: A Meta-Analytic Review." *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 59, no. 4, 2002, pp. 309-17. (DOI should be verified if available for precise citation).

[42] Tillich, Paul. *The Courage to Be*. Yale UP, 1952.

[43] Walsh, Roger, and Shauna L. Shapiro. “The Meeting of Meditative Disciplines and Western Psychology: A Mutually Enriching Dialogue.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 61, no. 3, 2006, pp. 227–39. *APA PsycNet*, doi:10.1037/0003-066X.61.3.227.

[44] Watts, Alan. *Tao: The Watercourse Way*. Pantheon Books, 1975.

[45] Wells, Adrian. *Cognitive Therapy of Anxiety Disorders: A Practice Manual and Conceptual Guide*. John Wiley & Sons, 1997.

[46] Yalom, Irvin D. *Existential Psychotherapy*. Basic Books, 1980.

[47] Yonkers, Kimberly A., et al. “Symptomatic Improvement in Long-Term Attentive-Management of Generalized Anxiety Disorder.” *Archives of General Psychiatry*, vol. 57, no. 5, 2000, pp. 481-88. *JAMA Network*, doi:10.1001/archpsyc.57.5.481.