
Hypnosis

Summary

- Hypnosis is designed to induce a relaxed and suggestible state of mind.
 - Contrary to popular belief, you are always in control and can't be hypnotised against your will.
 - Hypnosis does not work for everyone.
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Hypnosis, also known as hypnotherapy, is a method of inducing a trance or a dream-like state of deep relaxation in order to treat disorders of a mainly psychological or emotional origin. It has been practised in various forms for thousands of years by many cultures including Druid, Celtic and Egyptian. In the 19th and early 20th centuries, hypnosis (or 'mesmerism') was seen more as a sideshow curiosity than a valid medical treatment.

Today, hypnosis is recognised by the scientific community as an effective healing tool, although how it works is still something of a mystery. It is not a treatment in its own right, but is used as a part of medical, psychological and dental treatments.

Disorders helped by hypnosis

Hypnosis can help you change attitudes, perceptions and behaviours. It can be effective in treating a range of medical and psychological issues, including:

- Anxiety
- Asthma
- Chronic pain
- Fears and phobias
- Smoking
- High blood pressure
- Insomnia
- Panic attacks
- Stress
- Migraine
- Obesity
- Thumb sucking
- Sleep problems
- Sexual problems
- Stuttering.

The hypnotic state

The brain has different levels of consciousness, or awareness, ranging from fully alert to drowsy to fully asleep, with variations in between. Hypnotic states occur naturally and spontaneously.

Everyday examples include:

- Daydreaming
 - Being absorbed in a pleasant task and losing track of time
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- Doing a mundane task (such as washing the dishes) while thinking about something else, to the degree that you can't actually remember performing the task
- Getting lulled into a dreamy state by boredom, for example, when listening to a dull speech.

Clinical hypnosis deliberately induces this kind of relaxed state of awareness. Once the mind is in a relaxed state, any therapeutic suggestions can have great effect on attitudes, perceptions and behaviours. The way that this occurs isn't fully understood. Some researchers believe that hypnosis promotes particular brain wave activity that allows the mind to take in and adopt new ideas, while others suggest that hypnosis accesses the 'unconscious mind', which is more open to new ideas than the rational 'conscious mind'.

Hypnosis - you are in control

Suggestions may be taken to heart, but only if those suggestions are acceptable to the hypnotised person. Contrary to popular belief, you can't be hypnotised into doing things against your will. You can't be forced into a hypnotic state either. Instead, you allow yourself to be hypnotised. It is a voluntary altering of your own consciousness, and you are always in control. In other words, you are hypnotising yourself.

Risks of hypnosis

Hypnosis is considered to be a safe treatment when performed by a qualified and experienced practitioner. In rare cases, however, a patient may have unwanted side effects such as:

- Dizziness
- Headache
- Feelings of anxiety
- Stomach upset
- False memories.

Results of hypnosis

While it appears that almost anyone can be hypnotised, hypnosis does not always bring about good results. It is unclear why hypnosis does not work for everyone. Some researchers believe that a person is born with character traits that allow hypnosis to work, while other researchers believe that the ability to be hypnotised is a learned skill.

Suggestibility doesn't mean you have a weak character, as popularly believed. A strong-minded person may be a good candidate for hypnosis because they will strive to get results from treatment.

People who get the best results from hypnosis appear to have a few things in common, including:

- A good imagination
- The ability to get lost in a movie or book
- The ability to concentrate and keep mental focus.

Methods of hypnosis

Typically, relaxing the mind involves the use of imagery. For instance, you might be asked to imagine a peaceful scene. Being in a hypnotic state feels similar to the dreamy state of mind that exists just before falling asleep, except you are alert and aware of your surroundings.

There are many ways to deliberately induce this altered state of consciousness, including:

- A qualified hypnosis practitioner
- Hypnosis audiotapes
- Imaginative techniques

- Relaxation techniques.

Special considerations for hypnosis

It's important to understand the potential benefits and risks of any therapy, medicine or treatment. Always see your doctor before using any type of complementary therapy. Hypnosis may be safe and may work for others, but it may not be the best treatment for you.

Hypnosis should be avoided if you are suffering from:

- Severe depression
- Psychosis
- A drug or alcohol problem
- Chronic pain that has not been investigated and diagnosed by a qualified doctor.

Finding a therapist

Ask your doctor for a referral or contact a professional association for a list of members. During your initial consultation, inform your hypnotherapist about your medical history and any conventional medical treatment that you are having, including prescription or over-the-counter medicines.

Tell your doctor about your hypnosis treatments to help make sure you receive coordinated and safe treatment that is appropriate for you.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Australian Society of Hypnosis Tel. (02) 9747 4691
- Australian Hypnotherapists Association National Information Line Tel. 1800 067 557

Things to remember

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Australian Society of Hypnosis

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