

# HYPNOTHERAPY

## An effective tool for the modern medicine cabinet

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Hypnotherapy has become a trusted part of modern health care. You may have been reluctant to try this complementary therapy as part of a treatment plan. However, as hypnotherapy can effectively treat a wide variety of ailments, it is a tool worth considering.

Hypnotherapy should not be confused with hypnosis. Hypnosis, in itself, is neither a therapy nor a treatment. Hypnosis is a natural state, one that everyone experiences. It involves focused attention, heightened concentration and senses. Hypnosis is characterized by a slowing of brain waves. It occurs naturally during the course of everyone's day. Activities such as daydreaming or being absorbed in a book create slower brain waves. Similar brain activity appears when hypnosis is induced.

Hypnosis is not a form of mind control. It cannot be done against your will.

While being hypnotized, you can still reject suggestions. Hypnotherapy combines hypnosis and therapeutic intervention. Deep relaxation can activate one's inner resources, helping to change behaviour, emotions or attitude. It can be used to manage problems such as stress, anxiety, fears, pain, addictions, and weight loss. A trained hypnotherapist can bring about the state of hypnosis.

The term hypnosis comes from the Greek 'hypnos,' which means sleep. The study and practice of hypnosis dates back hundreds of years. In the 1600s, Danilewsky experimented with animal hypnosis.

He studied physiological workings in animals. Dr. Franz Anton Mesmer, of the late 1700s, may be the historical figure most associated with hypnosis. Mesmer had many published accounts of cures using his techniques of suggestion to those in a hypnotic state. At one time, hypnosis was known by the term Mesmerism.

Before Freud, hypnotic suggestion was the only known method of psychotherapy. It was used

extensively with good results. Freud himself studied this technique for therapy.

During the Second World War, hypnosis was used to put soldiers back into action. It reduced stress, allowing the soldier to overcome traumatic experiences.

### Watching hypnosis at work in the brain

For years, scientists knew that hypnotherapy worked. However, they could not explain what mechanisms allowed this to happen. Modern tools used for diagnosis have helped scientists understand more about hypnotherapy.

During hypnosis, brain waves slow and one enters an altered state of consciousness, similar to that of dreaming. Studies using special magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) show that experiences received while in a hypnotic state are much different than imagined ones. The parts of the brain that respond during hypnotherapy are the same ones that activate if an experience actually takes place. MRI imaging shows that in hypnosis, people do not distinguish between real and suggested experience. Imagination, on the other hand, involves a different area of the brain.

Hypnotherapy can create convincing alternative realities. Patients can experience virtual surgical techniques that have the same results as actual surgery, without the associated risks. For instance, a group in Britain has patented a technique in which a patient has a virtual gastric banding surgery for weight loss. They have called it "hypnobanding." Patients have similar levels of success to those who actually undergo surgery. Meanwhile they avoid possible complications such as infections.

### Hypnosis in health care Medical procedures

Hypnotherapy can assist those facing invasive medical procedures and dental work. It is very helpful in reducing anxiety and pain.

Hypnotherapy cannot replace all forms of surgery. Yet many studies including some from Harvard Medical School show that hypnotherapy can assist with it. Hypnosis can lower anxiety before surgery. It even creates a certain level of anesthesia (numbness to pain) for some procedures.

Hypnotherapy can help heal wounds and make procedures less painful. One Belgian study showed that hypnotherapy reduced anxiety and controlled pain for burn patients.

## **During pregnancy and birth**

Hypnotherapy has proven to be very effective in maternity care. It can help a pregnant woman to be less stressed and anxious during the birth of her child. Often it allows a very comfortable and enjoyable birth.

Nausea and vomiting are common during pregnancy. Usually this resolves by the end of the first three months. However some women experience it throughout pregnancy. Such lasting and difficult symptoms can disturb a woman's metabolism and cause risk to the baby. Hypnotherapy can help both typical morning sickness and more severe nausea and vomiting avoiding the use of medications.

## **Managing pain**

Many hypnotherapists help to relieve pain. Studies done at several universities confirm that hypnotic analgesia (pain relief) can effectively manage chronic pain. Research has increased understanding of how we perceive pain. Using these new discoveries, hypnotherapists have found new ways to influence pain centres in the nervous system. A skilled therapist can use hypnotherapy to alter the awareness of pain, improving quality of life.

## **Medical conditions**

There is considerable evidence for the use of hypnotherapy in treating many medical conditions. Irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) is a disorder affecting smooth muscle function in the lower bowel. It involves painful abdominal cramping. Many different factors may increase pain and stress can play a major role. However, hypnotherapy can relieve and often

prevent pain. Those with IBS can then function normally without medications.

## **Cancer treatment**

Cancer pain and therapy are other areas where hypnotherapy can be a great benefit. Nausea and vomiting often a complication of chemotherapy can be controlled with hypnotherapy.

For many health care providers, hypnotherapy's proven effectiveness in managing pain has made it a standard intervention for treating pain from cancer. Many hospices have a hypnotherapist to help control pain without the powerful narcotics that turn final days into a drugged fog. A hypnotherapist can be called in by family to help a loved one stay comfortable, while still aware and present near the end of life.

## **Children**

Children, because of their readiness to use their creative minds are very successful in using hypnotherapy. Laurence Sugarman, a pediatrician in the U.S. has produced a documentary on the use of hypnosis in pediatric practice calling the technique *Imaginative Medicine in Action*. Parents or physicians can seek the skills of a hypnotherapist to help a child during medical procedures or injections. Hypnotherapy may also provide coping skills during major illness or other traumatic events. Therapy can ease bedwetting, nightmares, abdominal pain, migraine and exam or performance anxiety.

## **Weight loss**

We all know people who have dieted and lost significant weight, only to gain it back again. In part, this is because they have not removed the subconscious beliefs that set their internal weight scale. Hypnotherapy can release ideas around weight that are outdated or no longer useful. Through hypnotherapy, people can find the motivation to exercise, make healthy food choices and control cravings. Being able to tell the difference between true physiological hunger and emotional hunger is important. Hypnotherapy can help in distinguishing between the two, while strengthening body image.

## **Addictions**

Much work has been done using hypnotherapy for addictions, particularly with stopping smoking. For those ready to make a change, this intervention

often helps. Recently, a stop-smoking study was done at the University of Alberta, using an intense, single-session intervention. An independent researcher then tracked participants for results. Early data shows a success rate similar to interventions such as medications, without negative effects. For instance participants did not gain weight.

## **Other benefits**

Hypnotherapy can help in dealing with extreme fear, overcoming painful past experiences, and changing addictive or repetitive behaviours. It can address other issues interfering with personal growth and achievement.

Hypnotherapy benefits more than just the individual involved. A Harvard cost analysis showed lower costs for interventions such as radiological procedures. The cost of medications and associated side effects is also reduced.

Consider the benefit to society when someone has a virtual procedure and returns to work the next day, instead of eight to 12 weeks later with actual surgery. Many hospitals in the United States, such as the Mayo Clinic, have a hypnotherapist on staff to assist in various aspects of medical care. One hospital in Belgium has rearranged their entire operating room suite to accommodate a hypnotherapist.

One of the authors recently used hypnotherapy while teaching. During the lunch break, a student who had severe dental anxiety broke a tooth off at the root. Any thoughts of going to the dentist produced great distress. The student underwent a 'rapid induction' to a hypnotic state. During this, the teacher helped the student to release fear and anxiety. A technique called 'anesthetic glove' was used to numb the area and reduce pain. The student was given an anchor \* (placing the forefinger and thumb together) to use if she were to feel any anxiety. She reported later that she was able to go through the entire dental procedure completely relaxed, calm and totally pain free. This 'emergency' hypnotherapy session took no more than ten minutes. It shows the power that hypnotherapy can have without the side effects of medication.

\* An anchor is a concrete action the patient can perform that then reproduces the feelings tied to that action, usually calm and relaxation.

## **A hypnotherapy session**

Anyone who is open to the idea can be hypnotized. The experience is completely unique to each person. The client may possess unique hypnotic assets which allow an experience to be visual, auditory, olfactory (sense of smell) or kinesthetic (physical sensation) or it may combine all of the senses. Others may simply feel relaxed and focused during hypnosis.

A well-trained hypnotherapist can assess how responsive a person is to hypnosis during the first consultation. Not everyone who is hypnotized will be able to experience hypnotic pain relief. The benefit may come in other ways, such as being more calm and relaxed. The more you can use self-hypnosis techniques afterward, the more impact will come from the therapeutic session. A therapist can choose from many different techniques for an intervention.

To understand how a hypnotherapist works, consider an intervention designed to help deal with a fear of being in public settings. The therapist might lead the client through a guided imagery experience in a hypnotic state, in which the client meets and talks with others in a social setting. He or she can feel confident and in control. The therapist may take the person back in memory to a difficult event, or help uncover the root cause of the problem. The therapist can then facilitate the release of feelings and negative beliefs that may have come from previous experiences. Later, the client should be able to deal with actual stressful public settings in a more relaxed and calm way.

## **Finding a reliable hypnotherapist**

Hypnotherapists vary in training and technique. Finding a well trained, respected hypnotherapist can be challenging. Hypnotherapy courses vary in length, content, and the amount of supervised experience. Be certain that your therapist is professionally qualified and familiar with many techniques, especially in appropriately dealing with the root cause of problems, which is what makes hypnotherapy effective. Hypnotherapists should also be trained in dealing with situations which cause acute severe anxiety or emotional pain related to traumatic memories (abreactions). Any hypnotherapist should have the C.CHt (Certified Clinical Hypnotherapist) credential.

Consider adding the time-honoured art of hypnotherapy as a resource in your family/s medicine cabinet.