

How Hypnosis Helps

DEFINITION OF “CLINICAL HYPNOSIS”

Clinical hypnosis is a procedure during which a qualified health professional or therapist (the “hypnotist”) gives a patient carefully worded instructions to follow with the goal of helping the patient enter a state of deep relaxation. In this hypnotic state, the “hypnotized” patient is aware of everything that is going on, but at the same time, becomes increasingly absorbed in using his or her imagination as directed by the hypnotist.

The hypnotist gives the patient suggestions to experience changes in behaviors, feelings, sensations, images, perceptions, thoughts, beliefs, and/or physical functions or symptoms. Suggestions are typically included for relaxation, calmness, confidence, increased self-control and well-being. Instructions typically include imagining or thinking about pleasant experiences.

People respond to hypnosis in different ways. Most people report that they were NOT asleep, but instead, felt very relaxed and could hear everything the hypnotist said. Some people describe hypnosis as a state of *focused attention*, in which they feel very calm and relaxed. Others describe the experience as being one in which they feel *detached* and deeply *inwardly focused*. Still others describe the experience as one in which their sensations and perceptions feel heightened and more vivid.

In the hypnotic state, which is an *altered state of consciousness, awareness, and perception*, suggestibility is heightened. Both parts of the mind (conscious and subconscious) are more receptive to acceptable, therapeutic suggestions than they are in an ordinary waking state. Even in a light hypnotic “trance”, with the patient’s permission, the “doorway” to his or her subconscious mind opens. This makes it possible for the hypnotist to provide information to the patient’s subconscious in a form that the subconscious can accept.

Hypnosis is a safe procedure when it is employed by a qualified, licensed, responsible and experienced health professional. It is NOT about “Zap, you are under my spell!” as in some sort of a master/slave relationship. It is also NOT magic! Nobody can be hypnotized unless they want to be and unless they are willing to be a cooperative subject. No one can be hypnotized against their will.

In reality, all hypnosis is self-hypnosis. This is because in order for a person to enter the hypnotic state, he or she must *follow the hypnotist’s instructions*, and his or her conscious and subconscious minds must accept the hypnotist’s suggestions and make them his or her own.

Anyone who can follow instructions and who wants to be hypnotized can be hypnotized. The subject/patient is simply asked to suspend his or her disbelief and critical, analytical mind, and to allow whatever happens to happen *without trying* to make anything happen. The patient is thus asked to imagine and visualize the things the hypnotist says. Hypnosis occurs without effort on the patient’s part. It is the therapist/hypnotist’s job to analyze what is happening—not the patient’s!

If the patient’s mind wanders, that is perfectly all right. Hypnosis is among other things a state of controlled daydream-type thinking - a state of believed-in imagination. Mind wandering is what happens when a person daydreams. The patient is told that even when his or her conscious mind wanders, his or her subconscious mind will hear everything that the hypnotist is saying.

Practitioners use clinical hypnosis in *three* main ways as outlined by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (<http://asch.net/genpubinfo.htm>).

1. Encouraging the use of the imagination.

Under a focused state of attention, the human mind can use mental imagery to make the things we are imagining actually happen. For example, a patient with chronic back and sciatica leg pain may be asked to imagine what the muscles and nerves in his back and leg look like. If he imagines tight, twisted, knotted muscles and hot, pinched, inflamed nerves, he may be told in hypnosis to imagine this image changing to a more comfortable one.

2. Giving direct suggestions for therapeutic change.

Ideas are suggested to the patient in a form that the patient's subconscious can accept. This is initially done in the waking state. Then, *hypnosis trance* is induced with the goal of fixing the suggestions in place in the patient's subconscious. This is analogous to when an artist sprays a fixative on a painting to fix the colors in place and keep them from running.

3. Conducting subconscious exploration (or a *Hypnoanalysis*) to promote understanding and insight about the roots of the patient's problem using a technique called *ideomotor analysis*.

A therapist trained in this method of hypnosis can help a patient uncover, reframe and resolve (a) underlying motivations for self-defeating behavior, (b) subconscious inner conflicts, (c) key past experiences, and (d) subconsciously imprinted fixed ideas maintaining the patient's problem and symptoms.

When will hypnosis be beneficial?

While individual responses vary, and no guarantees of a "cure" can be ethically made, clinical hypnosis is beneficial when a patient is motivated to change and overcome a problem.

As stated by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, "It is important to keep in mind that hypnosis is like any other therapeutic modality: it is of major benefit to some patients with some problems, and it is helpful with many other patients, but it can fail, just like any other clinical method. For this reason, we emphasize that we are not 'hypnotists', but health care professionals who use hypnosis along with other tools of our professions."

Clinical Hypnosis is employed for treating problems of:

Addictions	Alcohol	Anxiety
Chronic Pain	Compulsions	Depression
Drug Dependency	Habits	Hypochondreasis
Nail Biting	Over-Eating	Panic Attacks
Phobias	Post Traumatic Stress	Preparation for Child Birth
Preparation for Surgery	Smoking	Tics
Preparation for Test Taking	Weight	

Length of Hypnosis Treatment:

As with most treatment procedures, length of hypnotic treatment will vary depending on the nature and severity of the problem. For some problems, such as smoking cessation or nail-biting, treatment can be as short as one visit. However, with other problems, such as weight loss, treatment requires several sessions.

For some problems (such as some types of anxiety and depression), hypnosis is employed as a tool in conjunction with some form of psychotherapy. By itself, hypnosis treatment is short-term, generally requiring anywhere from one to five visits.