
Self-Hypnosis

What is self-hypnosis?

Hypnosis is a process that increases communication between your mind and body. In hypnosis your mind goes into a trance—a daydream-like state. You become more focused and open to suggestion. There is no truth to the popular myth that hypnosis causes you to lose control. In fact, the opposite is true. Hypnosis can help you gain control over a specific condition. You can do hypnosis by yourself or with the help of books, videos, audiotapes or a trained therapist. But hypnosis cannot be done without your cooperation. Thus, all hypnosis is self-hypnosis.

How can self-hypnosis help me?

Focusing your attention during hypnosis allows you to use the close connection between your mind and body for a specific goal. Self-hypnosis can be used for many purposes. Some of them include: pain relief, healing from an injury, removing warts, overcoming anxiety on an airplane, changing habits, relaxing the smooth muscle of the intestines for more comfortable digestion, reducing nausea from chemotherapy, and improving outcomes from surgery.

What is a trance?

A trance is a heightened state of attention where your body is more open to suggestion. Everyone has experienced trances many times. A daydream is one example. In a daydream you are aware of where you are and what you are doing, but at the same time you are focused on the experience in your mind's eye. Being absorbed in a good movie is another example of a trance-like state. You become less aware of things around you and may respond to what is happening on the screen. You might jump if

scared or cry if you feel bad for a character. Yet, you are always in control. You can go get popcorn if you wish.

How does hypnosis work?

A good movie and a hypnosis session work in much the same way. By becoming absorbed in the movie or the session, you become less aware of distractions. This allows you to be more open to suggestion.

What is involved in self-hypnosis?

This handout will teach you a four-step process:

- tailoring the session to meet your specific situation
- going into a trance
- focusing your attention on a specific goal
- coming out of the trance.

How can hypnosis be tailored to help me the most?

Hypnosis should focus on your own unique beliefs, interests, and needs. The more the process relates to your specific situation, the more helpful it will be. First, you need to be clear about the purpose for hypnosis. Do you need relief from headaches? Are you trying not to be anxious when you fly on a plane? Are you healing from an injury? There are many possible goals. Focus on one. Prepare what you will say to yourself during the hypnosis session. You may want to work with a therapist initially or talk to your health care practitioner to learn what to say and what to imagine for a specific condition.



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Second, if you work with a therapist or clinician, s/he may ask questions to make the session personal for you. These might include the following or similar ones:

- Name a favorite place where you feel comfort and a sense of peace.
- What is your favorite color?
- What are some of your favorite activities?

How can I start a trance?

There are many different ways to start a trance. Children can do this very easily, but adults often need a little practice. It is helpful to use a trigger to tell the body it is time to relax and focus. The finger technique is one that is easy to do.

- **Finger technique to trigger trance**
Press the tips of your thumb and index finger together making the “OK” sign. After pressing firmly, take a deep breath and hold for a count of five. Breathe out releasing your fingers. This acts as a signal for your body to relax and go into trance. You can use it at any time for self-hypnosis.

You can use another exercise to help you become more relaxed and deepen the trance.

- **Imagine a staircase to become relaxed and deepen your trance.**
Imagine a beautiful staircase with ten steps. Slowly walk down the stairs to your favorite place. Use each step to help focus on relaxing a different part of your body. Make this exercise personal by filling in your favorite places or colors.

This may go something like this:

Imagine a beautiful {favorite color} staircase that has ten steps. These ten steps lead to a peaceful and relaxing {favorite place}. Take a moment, then start counting backwards from 10 to 1. After each step focus on a different part of your body

allowing yourself to gently relax deeper and deeper with each step.

As you start at the top of the staircase, release any tension or strain in your body each time you breathe out.

10...Relax your face and jaw letting your tongue gently rest at the floor of your mouth.

9...Relax your temples, eyes and eyelids as you step down to [your favorite place].

8...Relaxing the back of your neck and shoulders, simply letting go...

7...Relax your arms knowing that there is nothing for them to do

6...Relax your chest, with each rise and fall of the breath

5...Relax your abdomen setting the muscles free

4...Relax your pelvis allowing it to sink into the chair

3...Relax your legs giving them the day off with nothing to support

2...Relax your toes as you arrive at...

1...

- **Exploring your favorite peaceful place**
Take a few moments to explore your peaceful place in your mind's eye. This will allow your trance to deepen. Involving all your senses will help you feel like you are really there.

- What do you see....colors, objects?
- Do you smell anything?
- Do you hear anything?
- Do you feel comfortable here? When you are comfortable, find a place to settle down or sit.

How can I use the trance to help myself?

After you are in a daydream-like state, you can use your focused attention for a specific purpose. The following example can be used for headache relief.



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Headache: Cool breeze technique

Cooling the head helps the blood vessels constrict (become smaller around). Imagining your hands warming helps reduce pressure and headache pain (especially migraines). Since tension often contributes to headaches, it may be helpful to spend more time relaxing your head.

Feel the muscles in your temples relax. Focus your attention on the eyes and forehead, and let them relax with each breath out. With each breath, let the muscles relax more and more. Now follow the muscles through the scalp to the base of the skull and relax this area. Breathe out and feel your whole head relax. Imagine walking along a snowy path in the mountains with a cool breeze blowing across your face, cooling your head, your face, your eyes. Imagine a cool and soothing sensation across your forehead and above each eye. Your hands are tucked in your pockets, so they are warming. They are warm. Your hands are warm and comfortable, while a cool breeze and cold air makes your head feel cooler, soothing and relaxing every muscle, releasing any tightness, any stress. Just feel a calm sensation flow through your eyes and forehead. You are calm and comfortable and relaxed. (Repeat if needed).

How should I come out of the trance?

You can reverse the process to become alert again. In your mind's eye, picture climbing back up the staircase. Feel the energy coming back into your relaxed muscles.

In a moment you will climb the staircase, counting each step. Afterwards you will be happy that you have learned about self-hypnosis. You will feel pleased because you realize that you can visit this place when you wish, having the power to influence your condition when needed.

- 1...As you proceed up the first step, allow the energy to re-enter your body starting at your toes...
- 2...And now allow it to flow up your legs...
- 3...into your pelvis as you feel it press into the chair
- 4...traveling to your abdomen, feel your body come alive
- 5...Take in this energy with each rise of the chest
- 6...As you feel it travel into your arms
- 7...Going up to the shoulders and neck
- 8...into the temples, eyes and eyelids
- 9...feel your tongue, jaw and the muscles of the face energize and allow your eyes to open when you are ready.
- 10...

How often should I do self-hypnosis?

You can use self-hypnosis as often as you want. It is an art that takes time and practice for best results.

What should I look for if I want to work with a specialist?

There are many hypnotherapists who advertise their services. Choose one who is licensed in a clinical field (for example, medicine, psychology, social work, or dentistry) and who is certified by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH). The ASCH and the American Psychotherapy & Medical Hypnosis Association (APMHA) provide referrals to qualified practitioners. To contact ASCH, call (630) 980-4740 or go to the website: <http://asch.net/referrals.asp>. For APMHA's referral service, go to <http://apmha.com/hypnosishelp/wanthelp.html>.



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Summary of the hypnosis process:

1. Tailor the session to fit your own unique circumstances.
2. Go into a trance.
 - Finger release technique to trigger trance
 - Staircase technique to help with progressive muscle relaxation and deepening of trance.
3. Use the trance for a specific purpose.
4. Come out of the trance.

The information in this handout is for general education. It is not meant to be used by a patient alone. Please work with your health care practitioner to use the information in the best way possible to promote your health and happiness.

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