

Hypnotherapy

What is hypnotherapy?

Hypnotherapy, or clinical hypnosis, can improve your health by helping you relax and focus your mind.¹ Someone trained in this powerful mind-body approach can help you go into a more focused state of mind (called a “hypnotic state”) so you can learn more about yourself, improve your health, and change your habits and thought patterns.

How does hypnosis work?

Hypnosis can work in several ways:²

- It can draw on your ability to use your imagination to bring about helpful or healthy changes.
- The hypnotherapist can offer a therapeutic idea or suggestion while you are in a relaxed and focused state. In this state of focused attention, the effect of the idea or suggestion on your mind is more powerful. That means that you are more likely to take the helpful idea seriously and act on it in the future. This can help you reach your goals faster in your daily life.² For example, if the hypnotherapist offers the suggestion that you can stop smoking during hypnosis, this may improve your chances of being able to stop.
- Hypnosis can help quiet your mind. This may help you uncover useful hints from the past or from the subconscious, because you can remember better or look more deeply at how you think. In turn, this can help make the treatment more effective in a shorter amount of time. For example, if you have trouble sleeping, it might be easier to figure out why, because you can access other parts of your brain.

What can hypnosis help with?

Hypnosis is often used in combination with other treatments to help with physical and mental health concerns. Some examples are listed below:^{3,4}

- High blood pressure
- Digestive system issues and nausea
- Skin problems
- Allergies and asthma
- Pain
- Depression and anxiety
- Trauma (physical or emotional)
- Sleep

These are just a few examples. If you are wondering about other health concerns, it is worth asking an experienced hypnotherapist.

What are some myths about hypnosis?⁵

If you watch a hypnotist perform onstage at a public event, you may have the idea that hypnosis takes away a person’s control. That is not true. During a hypnosis session, you stay in charge of your mind and body. You will not be asleep, and you will not be forced to do anything against your will. In fact, all forms of hypnosis are considered self-hypnosis. With practice, most people can reach a hypnotic state without anyone’s help.

What can I expect during a hypnosis session?

The session usually begins with a relaxation exercise, followed by an induction technique. An induction technique is a series of steps that can help you enter a state of hypnosis, of deeper relaxation and focus. For example, you may be asked to imagine yourself in a relaxing, safe, and healing environment. Once your mind and body are deeply relaxed, the next step is to focus your attention on a specific wish or goal. You may wish to focus on a specific health concern that is affecting your well-being. At the end of the session, the therapist will gently guide you back to the present moment.

Are there any risks?

In general, hypnosis is very safe in the hands of a trained provider. It is not recommended for patients who have severe mental illness. Side effects of hypnosis are rare. They can include things like a headache, feeling sleepy or dizzy, or feeling anxious or stressed. In very rare cases, false memories can be created. False memories are thoughts that seem like memories, of things that didn't actually happen.

An upsetting, traumatic, or difficult image may surface during hypnosis. If that happens, let your hypnotherapist know. He or she is trained to help guide you through challenges. If you have concerns, ask questions and talk with them ahead of time.

It is always a good idea to check with your health care team before deciding if hypnosis is right for you.

How can I find a hypnotherapist?

You can search the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis website (<https://www.asch.net/>) for a hypnosis provider in your area.

For you to consider:

- What personal or health goals would you like to accomplish in the near future?
- Do you think hypnosis could help you reach your goals?
- How do you think hypnosis compares with other "Power of the Mind" approaches you know about?
- Are you interested in meeting with a hypnosis provider? If so, whom will you contact?

The information in this handout is general. **Please work with your healthcare team to use the information in the best way possible to promote your health and happiness.**



For more information:

ORGANIZATION	RESOURCES	WEBSITE
University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program	A variety of Integrative Whole Health handouts on your surroundings	https://www.fammed.wisc.edu/integrative/resources/modules/
American Society of Clinical Hypnosis	More detailed information on hypnosis	https://www.asch.net/
American Psychological Association	More detailed information on hypnosis	http://www.apa.org/topics/hypnosis/
Mayo Clinic Website	More detailed information on hypnosis	http://www.mayoclinic.org/tests-procedures/hypnosis/basics/definition/prc-20019177

This handout was adapted for the University of Wisconsin Integrative Health Program from the original written for the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) by Alexandra Ilkevitch MD, Honorary Fellow, Integrative Health Program, University of Wisconsin Department of Family Medicine and Community Health. It is based in part on a document for clinicians, "Clinical Hypnosis: Clinical Tool," written by Shilagh A. Mirgain PhD and Janice Singles PsyD. The handout was reviewed and edited by Veterans and VHA subject matter experts.

References

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