

## Can Hypnosis Relieve Depression?

**The answer is yes, possibly, but don't skip psychotherapy.**

By Dr. Rob for MSN Health & Fitness

**Q:** I'm a 21-year-old female. I've suffered from clinical depression since I was 16. I'm tired of taking antidepressants, and the weight I've gained as a result. I've taken a few different kinds of antidepressants and I just don't notice a difference. I don't have a direct family doctor and am not suicidal. But the doctors I do see don't seem to have any interest. So my question to you is, can hypnosis work? Is it actually effective?

**A:** I am sorry to hear you don't feel like you are getting better, and am concerned you have not found a health care provider who has your best interests in mind. To me this is a key issue, and one that needs to be addressed immediately. I say that because you have missed an important and standard treatment approach through psychotherapy—especially since medications alone have not brought you out of your clinical depression. Professionals such as psychiatrists, psychologists and clinical social workers would help you understand and resolve problems that may be contributing to or causing your depression.

Alternative therapies can be effective tools in your treatment plan when used in combination with medication and counseling. There also are effective medications that don't cause weight gain, and would not add to your feelings of depression through this potential side effect.

Clinical depression (major depressive disorder) brings with it an intense sadness or despair that affects everyday life. For some this may mean keeping away from social activities or friendships. For others it may mean difficulties at work, school or in daily interactions with people. As you probably know, this form of depression is more severe than just having the blues or feeling sad for no reason at all. You can't just snap out of it. Clinical depression includes experiencing one of the following major symptoms for two weeks or more:

- Anhedonia, which is the inability to experience pleasure from normally pleasurable life events (food, sex, social activities, exercise)
- Depressed mood

And at least five of the following, again that exhibit for two weeks or more:

- Unexplained loss of energy (mental or physical)

- Change in appetite leading to unplanned weight gain or loss
- Feelings of overwhelming sadness or fear
- The inability to feel any emotion at all, like an empty feeling
- Change in sleeping patterns (sleeping more or having trouble with sleep)
- Feeling very irritable
- Loss of hope, feeling helpless
- Intense feelings of guilt
- Feeling worthless
- Trouble concentrating or making decisions
- Frequent thoughts of death, or wanting to die
- Suicidal thoughts, with or without a plan
- Lack of self-esteem
- Physical aches and pains, often thinking they may be signs of a serious illness
- Self-hate and poor self-image

Although I can't stress enough how important the traditional combination of medication and counseling is for the treatment of your depression, hypnosis potentially can decrease some of the symptoms that add to your depressed feelings, and may indirectly brighten your mood. This technique can do this by:

- Boosting confidence
- Enhancing the belief that your traditional treatment plan will work
- Decreasing pain perception
- Improving sleep (which can do wonders to improve mood)
- Increasing motivation for activities (social interactions, exercise, others)
- Improving perception of self-worth
- Improving belief about a brighter future
- Enhancing coping skills to stressful events

If you choose to add hypnosis to your treatment plan, I would highly encourage you to speak with your family physician or mental health specialist (psychiatrist, psychologist, others) first so that your care can be coordinated. It is also important to re-evaluate your depressive illness since it may be due to another form of depression such as bipolar disease, which would require a different treatment approach. Also, when choosing a professional skilled and certified in the field of clinical hypnosis, please check out the Web site of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis at [www.asch.net](http://www.asch.net)

Lastly, you have to find a physician who gives you a sense of comfort and instills confidence. Please ask friends or colleagues for suggestions, or if that is too personal, I often recommend calling your local hospital and asking to speak to a social worker. These health professionals are highly trained and know their community doctors. Let them know what qualities you are looking for in a physician, and they most likely will be able to help.