

What is hypnosis?

Hypnosis is a state of focused concentration during which a person becomes less aware of his or her surroundings. Hypnotherapy is the use of hypnosis to treat physical or psychological conditions. Since 1958, the American Medical Association has recognized hypnotherapy as a valid medical treatment for certain conditions.

During a hypnotic state, or trance, people may be more likely to accept suggestions that can help change their behavior. A therapist (hypnotherapist) can lead the hypnosis, or he or she can teach people to hypnotize themselves (self-hypnosis). You can also learn self-hypnosis from books.

The hypnotherapist's goal is not to control a person or give the person answers but rather to help the person solve his or her own problems.

Self-hypnosis usually consists of writing or adapting a script to induce hypnosis (including suggestions to help with specific problems), recording the script, and playing the tape to become hypnotized. Some people are more comfortable with self-hypnosis because they are alone throughout the exercise and are in control of all suggestions made during the hypnotic trance.

Hypnosis does not work for everyone. You must be willing to focus your attention and follow the suggestions of the therapist. Contrary to popular belief, you cannot be hypnotized unwillingly. Also, once hypnotized, you will not follow directions against your wishes.

Experts do not know how hypnosis works, but it seems to put the body in a state of deep relaxation.

Some people believe hypnosis causes the brain to release natural substances that affect the way you perceive pain and other symptoms. Others believe hypnosis acts on the unconscious mind and allows you to control body reactions that you cannot normally control, such as blood pressure, heartbeat, and hunger.

What is hypnosis used for?

Hypnosis is not intended to cure disease but rather to relieve symptoms of illness. Hypnosis has been effective in relieving pain associated with surgery, paralysis, and childbirth. Also, it is widely used to control addictions to drugs, alcohol, food, and smoking. Hypnosis can reduce stress by increasing relaxation, offering positive suggestions, and eliminating negative thoughts.

Hypnosis can help with anxiety, insomnia, phobias, obesity, asthma, and irritable bowel syndrome. Research has also found that it can reduce cancer-related pain, labor pain, nausea, and vomiting. In some cases hypnosis is combined with cognitive therapy or other relaxation and behavioral techniques.

Is hypnosis safe?

No formal licensing exists in the United States to govern hypnotherapists. It is important to find a health professional with extensive training and experience in hypnotherapy. Many psychologists, counselors, doctors, and dentists are experienced in hypnotherapy.

Self-hypnosis is also considered safe, even when done by inexperienced people. There are no reported cases of harm resulting from self-hypnosis. However, do not perform self-hypnosis while you are driving a vehicle or are in any situation where you need to be fully alert or able to respond quickly (for example, while operating machinery or while supervising children).

Always tell your doctor if you are using an alternative therapy or if you are thinking about combining an alternative therapy with your conventional medical treatment. It may not be safe to forgo your conventional medical treatment and rely only on an alternative therapy.