

# CLINICAL HYPNOSIS

## OVERVIEW

Hypnosis is a tool that uses the power of the mind to bring about change. It is characterized as a state of inner absorption, concentration and focused attention. It is frequently used in medicine, dentistry, mental health, peak performance and other disciplines. The term hypnosis comes from the Greek word *hypnos* which means “to sleep” and is the name of the Greek god of sleep. Hypnosis has been used in medicine dating back to antiquity with ancient texts from Egypt, China, Greece and Rome all describing practices that are considered hypnotic.

## PURPOSE

The main purpose of hypnosis is to enable a person to have increased control over his or her behaviors, thoughts, emotions and physiological responses, and even physical health. Hypnosis evokes a naturally occurring trance state that is induced by mental concentration. This trance-like state is a similar experience to that of daydreaming, losing yourself in a book or movie, or getting lost in thought while driving and missing your exit. It is used medically to gain control over a specific condition or symptom, such as blocking pain sensations or reducing inflammation.

## CONSIDERATIONS

When referring a patient for hypnosis, be sure to refer to a practitioner who is appropriately trained. A good rule of thumb is to choose a practitioner who is licensed in a clinical field (such as medicine, psychology, social work or dentistry) and who is certified by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH). This organization provides extensive, comprehensive training and requires supervised practice before granting certification. ASCH and the American Psychotherapy & Medical Hypnosis Association (APMHA) provide referrals to qualified practitioners. Use the online [ASCH member referral](#) or call (630) 980-4740. Refer to the online [APMHA's referral service](#).

## APPLICATIONS

ASCH is the largest multi-disciplinary national organization dedicated to research and training in clinical hypnosis. It states that there is empirical support for hypnosis being used with the following:

- Gastrointestinal disorders (ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, colitis, Crohn's disease)

- Dermatologic disorders (eczema, herpes, neurodermatitis, pruritus/itching, psoriasis, warts)
- Surgery and anesthesiology
- Acute and chronic pain (back pain, cancer pain, dental anesthesia, headaches, and migraines, arthritis or rheumatism)
- Burns
- Nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy and pregnancy (hyperemesis gravidarum)
- Childbirth
- Hemophilia
- Allergies, asthma
- High blood pressure
- Raynaud's disease
- Dentistry related conditions

ASCH also states that there is evidence that hypnosis may be helpful in these psychological conditions:

- Trauma (incest, rape, physical and emotional abuse, cult abuse)
- Anxiety and stress management
- Depression
- Bed-wetting (enuresis)
- Sports and athletic performance
- Smoking cessation
- Obesity and weight control
- Sexual dysfunctions
- Sleep disorders
- Concentration difficulties, test anxiety, and learning disorders

## **SELF-HYPNOSIS PREPARATIONS**

All hypnosis is considered a form of self-hypnosis. During hypnosis, trance is experienced as attention that becomes narrowly focused and relatively free of distractions. The body experiences physical relaxation. This heightened state of awareness allows a person to be more receptive to suggestions that can influence physical changes. Almost everyone can enter a hypnotic state themselves using 4 steps:

1. Self-hypnosis is typically done by first beginning with a relaxation exercise. For more instructions, refer to "[Progressive Muscle Relaxation](#)" and "[Progressive Relaxation](#)."
2. After several minutes of relaxation, the second step is to pick one of the trance induction techniques listed below to produce an altered state of consciousness.

3. Once in a trance state, you can use imagery and/or make your own suggestions to the subconscious mind for what you would like to work on during the self-hypnosis session.
4. Finally, you end your self-hypnosis session by re-alerting yourself in order to return to an alert, awake and fully conscious state.

## **TRANCE INDUCTION TECHNIQUES**

There are many different techniques for inducing a trance-like state. This is established by using an induction procedure that usually includes instructions for relaxation to produce an altered state of consciousness. There are 5 popular induction techniques that are easy to learn and can be done independently for self-hypnosis:

### **1. HEALING STONE TECHNIQUE AND THUMB FINGER TECHNIQUE**

Find a small stone for this induction technique. Hold this stone between your thumb and index finger with a comfortable amount of pressure. As you begin the induction technique, press into the stone with your thumb and index finger as you breathe in for the count of four. On the outbreath, begin to relax and notice sensations in the stone as you breathe out for the count of six. Do this for a few more times until your body and mind start to relax. With practice, pressing your fingers into the stone can become a signal for your body to quickly relax and go into trance.

### **2. THUMB-FINGER TECHNIQUE**

If you don't have a stone in your office, press the tips of your thumb and index finger together in an "OK" sign. As you begin the induction technique, press your fingers more firmly together as you breathe in for the count of four. On the outbreath, begin to relax and notice sensations in your fingers as you breathe out for the count of six. Do this for a few more times until your body and mind start to relax. With practice, pressing your thumb and index finger together can become a signal for your body to quickly relax and go into trance.

### **3. THE STAIRCASE**

Imagine standing at the top of a beautiful staircase that has ten steps and a banister that can be held on to in order to steady yourself. You may want to imagine a wooden staircase or a staircase that is carpeted with your favorite color of carpet. It leads to a relaxing, peaceful place. Then, with each outbreath, imagine walking down the staircase step by step and with each number that you count you can feel yourself becoming more and more relaxed. If the image of a staircase is not relaxing, you could imagine an elevator, escalator or even a path that has ten stops along the way.

#### **4. HEALING PLACE**

Imagine being in the most beautiful, serene and safe place you can. In this place, you feel comfort and a sense of peace, and you can engage in a favorite activity. It can be a place that you associate with healing. You can imagine being there at your favorite time of year, at the best part of the day. Create it as if you have unlimited resources and time to build the perfect spot for yourself. Take the time to explore being there using all of your senses; notice what colors you see, what smells you catch, what sounds you hear, and what objects appear. Spend some time being in this place, absorbing some of the peace and tranquility of this place. You may also want to imagine lying down or sitting in this place to more deeply relax.

#### **5. EYE ROLL**

If you do not have any eye issues or headache conditions, you might consider using this induction technique. On your next in-breath, roll your eyes up towards your eyebrows then all the way up to the top of your head. Continue looking up with your eyes, while holding the breath as if you can look out of the top of your head. Then, on your next out breath, allow your eyelids to slowly and gently lower and possibly flutter closed as your eyes relax into a comfortable position. As all the breath leaves your body, sink more deeply into a relaxed feeling, more than you can ever remember relaxing before. Feel that relaxing feeling flowing down from the face, allow the jaw to unclench, let this pleasant sensation flow down to your neck and shoulders to loosen pockets of tension, down throughout your torso into your abdomen, and then down through your legs to the tips of your toes. Your whole body relaxes as you release any unnecessary tension. Your mind begins to feel quite quiet and calm, feeling so peaceful, safe and comfortable.

### **USES FOR HYPNOSIS**

After the trance induction, hypnosis can be used to support a specific goal. There are many possible uses of this focused attention. Mental imagery or suggestions are frequently used to experience ideas, suggestions, feelings and physical processes that are different from those that typically occur in daily life. Recent research demonstrates that hypnotic communication and suggestions effectively change aspects of a person's physiological and neurological functions. Some examples of the uses of these suggestions and images include:

- Pain relief
- Healing from an injury
- Improving outcomes from surgery
- Anxiety and stress management
- Controlling habit/behavioral disorders (such as trichotillomania)
- Performance enhancement for athletes
- Smoking cessation
- Obesity and weight control

- Improving digestion through soothing the muscle of the intestines
- Reducing nausea from chemotherapy
- Removing warts
- Dermatologic disorders
- Childbirth
- Gastrointestinal disorders, such as IBS
- Burn relief

## RE-ALERTING

The process of re-alerting oneself is important, so that a person may be directed back to an alert, awake, and fully conscious state. It may involve a reversal of the induction technique, such as climbing up the staircase and becoming more and more awake. Some people set a timer so as to have an auditory cue that returns them to a normal state of consciousness. It is important to feel comfortable and confident in using whatever technique works to reorient yourself.

You might say something silently to yourself like, “In a moment I will be climbing up the stairs and return to a normal, wakeful state. As I count from A to E, I will become more and more awake, feeling content and happy that I have learned self-hypnosis to improve my health and sense of well-being. Starting with A, I can walk step by step up the stairs. With each letter, I will become more and more alert, feeling energy and vitality enter my body and my mind. Taking all the time that I need, I can come back fully in to the present moment. When I am ready, I can open up my eyes. I will feel completely refreshed, alert and ready to continue on with my day. I can feel confident in the knowledge that I can use the power of my mind to influence my health and well-being when needed.

## AUTHOR(S)

“Clinical Hypothesis” was written by [Shilagh A. Mirgain](#), PhD and by [Janice Singles](#), PsyD (2016).

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