

## Hypnosis Helps

What would you expect to hear if you asked someone if they have ever been hypnotized? You might be surprised by the variety of response. Most people have seen stage hypnotists where selected audience members act out the direct suggestions of the entertainer. Horror movies portray hypnotized people behaving as zombies or carrying out assassinations after a cue activated a deeply planted hypnotic suggestion. Many people have tried group hypnotic sessions to quit smoking or to rid themselves of undesirable personal habits. And there are some who fear hypnosis is dangerous, a way for evil spirits or devilry to emerge. Yet, have you ever driven past the exit you take every day on a common commute without even realizing you had done so? Have you had an experience where you have been so absorbed in some activity that you were performing a task almost automatically, without apparent thought, easily and with great focus? If so, then you have been in a state that is hypnotic. So then- what is hypnosis??

First, before providing a definition of hypnosis, let's establish context where hypnosis is proven to be a facilitator for a process of personal change and a template that energizes our resources for personal growth.

Licensed Psychologists are trained to provide psychotherapy for emotional afflictions, such as depression, anxiety, phobias, addictions and trauma. Other stressors, such as chronic pain or the stress of caregiving for an ill relative or a sense of purposelessness and emptiness in life are treated in the psychologist's office. The habit-addictions such as smoking and overeating, gambling and internet addictions destroy relationships and careers. Chronic sleep problems and sleep deprivation ranks high on the list for risks of developing serious illness, medical and psychological. Psychotherapy treatment is available whether you are trying to change a health threatening habit, or have developed a depressive or anxiety disorder, or are struggling with high levels of chronic stress. However, the most essential element in successful treatment is not the nature of the specific problems, nor necessarily the type of therapy delivered. It is instead the hopeful expectation carried by the hurting and afflicted person that changes will happen-reliable changes; changes that can go beyond just solving the problem; changes that constitute a more vital manner of living; one that generates resilience against future relapse. Clinical hypnosis can be a vitalizing element in a psychotherapy treatment.

Now to our question- what is hypnosis? How does it work? The American Psychological Association, Division 30 that is dedicated to clinical hypnosis provided the following definition in 2014 –“A state of consciousness involving focused attention and reduced peripheral awareness characterized by an enhanced capacity for response to suggestions.” The basic experience of hypnosis is the generation of a state of deep relaxation. During this state, an altered sense of perception and awareness occurs. In this state of profound relaxation, the mind becomes able to focus with a different, more powerful intensity. The conscious and the subconscious mind are in a state of readiness and receptivity to therapeutic suggestions. A practitioner trained in both psychotherapy and clinical hypnosis can offer an effective, lasting and reliable method to relieve distress and bring lasting psychological changes to anyone.

Of course there are some widely held common misconceptions about hypnosis. The movies and television depictions suggest a person will lose consciousness. The truth is that consciousness is altered, not lost when undergoing hypnosis and the result is an ability to access more easily your own resources for change. Another common misconception about hypnosis is that a persons will can be weakened or overtaken by the hypnosis. This does not happen in any way. Any person experiencing a hypnotic trance cannot be made to do anything against their will. You are in control and can simply stop the process at

any time if you are uncomfortable. Yet another misnomer is that while hypnotized, you will start to speak spontaneously about subjects you would wish to keep private. While it is true that during hypnosis talking is encouraged, and discoveries can be made, there is no danger that you will reveal any information that for your own personal reasons you would want to keep private. Lastly there are those that say they cannot be hypnotized. While that can be true, it is not entirely accurate. Individuals do differ in their susceptibility to hypnosis, but anyone who wants to can be hypnotized. And the experience of hypnosis is a skill. You can learn how to be hypnotized and improve your ability to be hypnotized.

Hypnosis itself is not the therapy. Hypnosis sets the stage for the trained psychotherapist to work with your concerns. Hypnosis can be effective in the treatment of phobias, anxiety, depression and psychological trauma. Hypnosis is highly effective for treatment of chronic pain, especially when utilized in conjunction with medical treatment available at the many excellent pain treatment centers. There have been exciting results when hypnosis is utilized to treat IBS, Crohns Disease and GERD. Hypnosis can be a powerful tool for finally quitting smoking or any other tobacco addiction. And a hypnotically supported treatment can open the mind to the development of a deeper self-understanding, energize motivation for dismantling personal obstacles that may have stood in the way of cultivating richer relationships with other or attaining more career success. Stress has been called the silent killer and the use of hypnosis can teach the mind methods of reducing levels of systemic stress, that stress that we have simply grown accustomed to accepting in our lives. Reduced levels of stress are directly correlated to improved immune system function, deeper, more restorative sleep, anger and frustration reduction, and a general sense of purposeful living. Sleep disorders are treatable with hypnosis. And while hypnosis is not sleep, a session of hypnosis will leave you feeling relaxed, alert, energetic and clear headed.

If you decide to seek out psychotherapy and would like hypnosis to be part of your overall treatment plan, then ask if the practitioner has been trained and certified in hypnosis. A clinician should be licensed to practice psychotherapy and be certified by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis as well as participating in ongoing education and training to remain current to the best practices in applying hypnosis.

Dr. John F. Grace is a licensed Clinical Psychologist. He has a private practice in psychotherapy and psychological assessment located in Athens Ga. He is also a Senior Staff Psychologist at the Eating Disorders Recover Center of Athens. He is certified in Clinical Hypnosis. He is a member of the American Psychological Association, The Georgia Psychological Association, The Athens Area Psychological Association, The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis and The American Academy of Pain Management.