

## HYPNOSIS

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### The Road to a More Successful You May Be All in Your Mind

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*by Janice MacDonald*

Does this sound familiar? You've got 10, 15, 20 or more pounds to lose - the same pounds you've been losing and regaining your whole adult life. It's not as though you don't know what causes scale creep; you can recite the calorie count of everything in your refrigerator. Exercise? You know all about that, too. The problem is that somehow you just can't make it happen.

If you only could summon enough inner strength to eat the way you know you should, kick the chocolate craving and get out there and pound the pavement.

Ever thought about hypnosis? You've probably seen the ads: "Change anything about yourself you don't like" promises one. "Lose weight, be more successful, stop smoking, overcome shyness," claims another.

The ads claim you can even improve your golf game.

"Hypnosis will help you improve your golf game," said Ashley Goodman, a San Diego dentist and a past president of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. "But that's because it improves your concentration."

Hypnosis is a highly focused state of attention, explained Goodman, likening it to using a magnifying glass to focus the rays of the sun and make them more powerful. When you mind is concentrated, you are able to use it more effectively, she said.

"Properly done, hypnosis is the most powerful way to change thinking and behavior," said Dr. Shawn McQuilkin, an Ogden, Utah physician who uses hypnosis techniques in his medical practice and has produced CDs on using the technique for smoking cessation and weight loss. "Hypnosis puts you in touch with your own inner strength."

Board-certified in internal medicine, McQuilkin cautions that his CDs are not designed to treat eating disorders or medical reasons for being overweight, but to help people help themselves by reprogramming their thinking.

A common myth about hypnosis is that it involves surrendering control and then being made to do something against your will while you're in a hypnotic state, said McQuilkin, who added that the opposite is actually true.

"Hypnosis uses the power of the mind to bring about change in the body," he said. "You're exercising the ultimate in self-control by tapping into powers you didn't realize you had."

All hypnosis, whether facilitated by a therapist or not, is self-hypnosis and, much like meditation, generally involves a state of deep relaxation, according to Lobsan Rapgay, an assistant clinical professor in the department of psychiatry and biobehavioral sciences at UCLA.

But Rapgay, who uses hypnosis to help alleviate a variety of behavioral and medical problems, explains that while meditation is intended to clear the mind, hypnosis has the specific goal of changing behavior.

A hypnosis session typically involves a three-step process: the subject is induced into a deeply relaxed state, sometimes called a hypnotic trance; a therapeutic suggestion is made to encourage specific changes in behavior or relief of symptoms; and then a post-hypnotic suggestion is offered. Designed to alter perception or behavior after the trance ends, the post-hypnotic session is often a reminder that will reinforce new behaviors.

On McQuilkin's weight loss CD, for example, he suggests using the color red as a reminder to avoid junk food, while using the color green as a cue for healthier eating.

Hypnosis was endorsed by the American Medical Assn. in the mid-1950s and is recognized by other governing bodies, including the American Psychological Assn., as an effective therapeutic tool when used in conjunction with various other treatments.

Beyond its use as a method for weight management and smoking cessation, hypnotherapy has also been used for such objectives as pain control, as an alternative to sedation during such medical procedures as angioplasty and to help speed up post-surgical recovery.

Dr. Leo Busculli, a psychiatrist based in Bishop, uses hypnotherapy for pain control. A patient might be asked to visualize the pain as a certain color - bright red at first and then, as pain diminishes, a progressively cooler spectrum. Or he might suggest that a patient imagine her pain attached to a balloon and watch it fly away.

"The more pain someone is in, the more motivated they are to do anything to relieve it," he said.

Still, to imagine pain as floating balloon or as a radio dial that can be turned down requires a certain suspension of disbelief, and that, Busculli said, is essentially the key to hypnosis.

The process works by short-circuiting the critical censor of the conscious mind - the part that often defeats what we know to be in our best interests, Busculli said.

In a treatment to stop smoking, for example, a suggestion might be that the patient will no longer find smoking pleasurable or necessary. Or in order to lose weight, the suggestion might be that exercise will become enjoyable.

While a person's conscious mind might scoff, the same person would be less critical or disbelieving in a hypnotized state and more responsive to suggestions for improvement, according to Busculli.

### It's Not A Cure All

But hypnosis is not a magic bullet, warned Gary Wood, a past president of the Southern California Society of Clinical Hypnosis. People often have unreasonable expectations, such as thinking it can cure a cocaine addiction, Wood said.

"Typically, it's used as one part of a broader treatment plan rather than a stand-alone therapy," he said.

Like any other therapy, Wood cautioned, "Hypnosis can be very helpful to some people and fail to work best when you're highly motivated and your therapist is well trained and understands your particular problem."

Wood said that success also depends upon your susceptibility to being hypnotized. This varies and has nothing to do with intelligence or gullibility, or even whether you're highly motivated or especially willing to be hypnotized. If, however, you're the kind of person who gets deeply absorbed in a book or task or even daydreams to the exclusion of everything else around you, chances are you're more hypnotizable.

There are recognized scales that measure the extent to which a subject responds to hypnosis. According to McQuilkin, most people can achieve the necessary state of hypnosis for the unconscious mind to absorb therapeutic suggestions.

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