

THE HEALING POWER OF HYPNOTISM

You are getting sleepy, not to mention slimmer, healthier and less stressed.

RD Health
by Peter Jaret

"I'm going to count from one to five," psychologist David Patterson tells a burn patient at the University of Washington in Seattle. "With each number you'll sink deeper and deeper into a state of pleasant relaxation." With hypnotic suggestion, the patient feels less pain during the often excruciating process of having burns treated.

Far more than a parlor trick, hypnosis is proving to be a potent healing tool. A recent review of 18 studies found that the technique helped lessen pain in three out of four patients. It has also been credited with relieving asthma and anxiety and making warts disappear.

Hypnosis can even speed healing. Harvard Medical School psychologist Carol Ginandes recently gave a group of post-surgery patients hypnotic suggestions, over several weeks, such as "your skin is knitting together rapidly, becoming strong, smooth and elastic." Her experiment showed that patients who received hypnosis healed significantly faster than those who didn't.

How it works is a puzzle. Hypnosis doesn't interfere with pain transmission, but instead affects parts of the brain involved in pain perception. It may alter brain chemicals linked to other systems in the body, such as the immune system, which could explain its influence on healing.

"No one can be hypnotized against their will," says University of Tennessee psychology professor Michael Nash. "People under hypnosis aren't robots who'll do anything. But they do become exquisitely receptive to suggestions."

Hypnosis doesn't work for everyone or everything. About 5% of us can't be hypnotized, and while it seems to help some people lose weight, it is less effective for treating alcoholism or quitting smoking.

Avoid practitioners who describe themselves solely as hypnotists or hypnotherapists. "if you're being treated for pain, see a specialist in that field who uses hypnosis," says Nash. "Hypnosis is a powerful tool, but it works best in combination with other treatments."