

What You Need To Know About Hypnosis **And How It Can Help You**

HYPNOSIS has been around for as long as humans have kept records. And of course, for long before. Why? Because hypnosis, or trance, is a natural human ability. Without going into hypnosis, people wouldn't be able to learn, to focus attention, undergo religious rites without pain, experience pain-free child birth and much more...

In this article, we intend to show you that [hypnosis](#) is much, much more than a controversial stage trick. Hypnosis is your birthright, hypnosis is a natural ability and hypnosis is the most powerful psychological tool available to you as an individual, as a therapist or as a communicator.

What's so special about hypnosis?

So much, but here's a few specific examples to whet your appetite!

Using hypnosis, you can:

- ✓ Undergo major surgery without chemical anaesthesia
- ✓ Hallucinate something which isn't really there
- ✓ 'Hallucinate out' something that is really there
- ✓ Comfortably overcome life-long phobias
- ✓ Get rid of the 'flashbacks' that sometimes follow a traumatic experience
- ✓ Learn to be confident and improve performance in situations such as public speaking and sporting events
- ✓ Lower blood pressure and heighten immune function

- ✓ Accelerate the body's rate of healing
- ✓ Learn to come out of depression and stay out
- ✓ Increase your strength (at least in the short-term)
- ✓ Beat addictions

And so on...

Knowing about hypnosis enables you to avoid 'negative self hypnosis'

Understanding hypnosis enables you to achieve mastery over many psychological problems. This is because hypnosis is often the 'glue' that holds problems in place.

Often, if you are experiencing emotional or performance problems, it is because you are using 'negative self-hypnosis'. An understanding of hypnosis and how to use it can free you from this tendency. By reading this article you will learn about hypnosis and how to use it well.

But I thought hypnosis was supposed to be good for you?

Hypnosis is neither good nor bad. As you will discover during the rest of this article, hypnosis is simply an ability of human beings. How it is used determines its effects.

This gives us a clue as to why hypnosis is such a central tool for change.

So what is hypnosis?

ALTHOUGH the effects of hypnosis can seem magical, hypnosis itself is actually very easy to understand.

Every time you focus down your attention you enter a kind of hypnotic trance. Whereas 'normal' awareness can involve being aware of many things, and the mind 'hopping around', a defining characteristic of the trance state is a single, or limited focus of attention.

Right now, for example, you are focusing your attention on your computer screen. While you've been doing that you have 'forgotten' or 'zoned out' the sensations of your feet on the floor. The same goes for the sensation of your watch on your wrist, the blinking of your eyes or the colors in the room.

This of course is an essential skill. To be effective in any situation we must narrow down our attention so we are less aware of irrelevant aspects of our experience. 'Deep trance' is simply an extension of this ability.

You can see this working when you are engrossed in a book or film and someone asks if you would like something to drink. You may have had the experience of not hearing someone at all, or being 'semi-aware' that they said something, but having no idea what it was!

But how does this explain stage hypnosis?

Carefully selected subjects are able to focus their attention so tightly on internal experience (as in a dream), that they become much less aware of their surroundings. In this way, internal experience becomes much more important than external.

So, hypnosis occurs all the time. When you learn about everyday hypnosis and ultradian rhythms, you really begin to see how you can use hypnosis to help yourself...

Everyday hypnosis and [ultradian rhythms](#)

Have you ever driven a familiar route to find that on arrival at your destination you have little or no recollection of your journey? That's hypnosis and hypnotic amnesia!

Do you ever 'lose yourself' in the bath or 'switch off' whilst listening to music? That's hypnosis and hypnotic dissociation!

Some people go into trance whilst exercising at the gym, jogging long distances or dancing the night away. That's hypnosis and hypnotic pain control and time distortion!

Hypnosis is present in any activity when time seems to 'fly.'

This may not sound like the sort of hypnosis you're used to reading about!

However, if hypnosis is to be recognised for the incredibly powerful and useful tool that it is, we need to understand how normal it is. For too long, misunderstanding has led to hypnosis being 'side-lined'.

It is time that we all understood just how normal hypnosis is, and just how powerful it can be as a tool for change.

Ultradian rhythms and the natural 'trance cycle'

You may have heard of the 'circadian rhythm'; the daily bodily cycle that regulates our 'awakeness' during the day and night. The Circadian rhythm is the reason that we feel like getting up in the morning (hopefully !) and what causes us to feel sleepy at bed time.

Another type of bodily rhythm is the 'Ultradian' rhythm. Whereas the circadian rhythm occurs once a day, [ultradian rhythms](#) happen more than once. One ultradian rhythm has been shown to moderate the 'hemispheric dominance' within the brain.

Although the exact function and interplay of the 2 hemispheres is as yet unknown, we do know that the left hemisphere is more specialised for linear, logical thought and communication, and the right is more active when we are relaxed, dreaming and in hypnosis.

If not too stressed, you will have, after getting out of bed in the morning, around 90 to 120 minutes more focused attention followed by a 20 minute period of lesser focus. This is often experienced as difficulty concentrating.

During this 20 minute period you are more likely to feel sleepy or 'day dreamy'. This is often the time that people take a break, grab a coffee or smoke a cigarette as a way to try and cheat this natural break.

However, since it has been shown that taking advantage of this natural rhythm has profound physical and mental health benefits, it is a better idea to do what your brain is asking you to do – Relax!

Hence the creation of 'power naps' and their adoption by progressive companies. Unsurprisingly, in workplaces where regular breaks are encouraged, productivity increases and rates of sickness drop.

Being able to use self hypnosis at these times is a highly efficient way of relaxing quickly and deeply and maximizing the benefit to your body and mind.

How to use self hypnosis every day

The next time you feel a loss of concentration at work, go to the toilet (or a quiet room, if your workplace is enlightened enough to have one!), sit down and close your eyes. Simply recall a time when you felt relaxed and focus on relaxing all the parts of your body. Focus on the process, rather than the outcome, and do this for a minimum of 10 minutes, and up to 20 if you can.

You should notice immediately an increase in mental agility, creativity and problem solving skills. Over a longer period, you will notice better emotional stability, improved self confidence, fewer addictive tendencies (including less need for caffeine) and many other 'spin off' effects.

This ultradian rhythm continues to affect us when we sleep, further strengthening the link between hypnosis and dreaming...

Hypnosis, dreaming and REM

The deepest trance state you ever experience is when you are dreaming. During dreaming, you are completely immersed in a self-created imaginary reality with little or no awareness that it is not 'for real' (similar to the hypnotised stage subject).

Dreaming is an amazing demonstration of your brain's ability to 'simulate reality', and a clear indicator of why hypnosis works. It is fairly common for a hypnotized subject to vividly experience an imagined reality, less so than in dreaming perhaps, but absorbing nonetheless.

The [rapid eye movement](#) (REM) of dreaming is also often observed during hypnosis. And indeed, a traditional way to induce hypnosis was by swinging a watch in front of the subject's eyes.

Since dreaming is largely concerned with 'clearing' the brain of emotional arousal, it is not hard to see one reason why hypnosis is so good for helping people with emotional problems.

Hypnosis, catalepsy and dreaming

A famous stage trick is to lie a hypnotised subject between two chairs and stand on their stomach. This is the sort of demonstration that has led to the idea that hypnosis is something strange. (Don't try this at home by the way, it's really bad for your back!)

However, when we consider the link to the dream state, the reason this is possible becomes much clearer. When you are dreaming, your ability to move is inhibited for obvious reasons - acting out your dreams would be highly dangerous for you and your sleeping partner.

This phenomenon also occurs during hypnosis and allows us to create '[catalepsy](#)', where parts of the body can become immobile or self supported for long periods without discomfort.

Hypnosis - How to Do It and What it Feels Like

So how do hypnotists do what they do? Well, basically the hypnotist communicates with you, verbally and non-verbally, in a way that allows you to become extremely comfortable and relaxed, and which allows your attention to focus down on a narrow area of experience.

She does NOT control you! Anyone who has been hypnotized knows that they retain control over their actions. Unconscious responses during hypnosis will only occur if they are appropriate to the situation.

Behaving strangely is appropriate during a hypnotic stage show but not in a therapist's office!

A good hypnotist is a master of communication and knows how to non-intrusively focus your attention inwards. She is able to use language to communicate to your unconscious, as well as your conscious mind.

Unconscious responses are perfectly common during 'normal' communication - laughter being one of them. During hypnosis, unconscious responses are extended beyond 'everyday' communication so that things like hypnotic numbness or hand levitation are possible.

[What does it feel like to be in a trance?](#)

IT IS a common misconception that trance is a state of unconsciousness like sleep or being in a coma.

In hypnosis you are often consciously aware of your thoughts and surroundings. However, you may still be pleasantly surprised by an unconscious response such as a 'hand levitation' or a pleasant memory springing to mind. This is similar to the way in which we might be 'surprised' by a giggling fit or blushing (also unconscious responses).

The most accurate description of the hypnotic state is a 'parallel awareness'. The hypnotized person knows who and where they are, but is also strongly focused on internal realities such as sensations, memories or imagination.

Occasionally after trance, a person may have little recollection of the content of the trance itself. This 'amnesia' occurs in the same way that it does when you awake from a dream. Often you are aware that you have had a dream, but can't remember what it was.

To learn more about how to do hypnosis and what it feels like, you may like to have a look at our [hypnosis training tape](#).

[How is hypnosis useful?](#)

To sum up, therapeutic hypnosis is a peaceful, creative and productive state of inner absorption. The lack of anxiety, or everyday 'reactive' responses, and the ability to control emotional responses and create new connections allows new learnings, abilities and potentials to develop.

Another major benefit of knowing about hypnosis is how to spot 'negative self hypnosis' and stop it happening...

'Negative self hypnosis' and emotional problems

By now you may be thinking that hypnosis sounds fantastic. And indeed it is. But we are only able to go into hypnosis because trance is part of our natural makeup as human beings. Without the ability to focus our attention, we wouldn't be able to concentrate, learn, remember, recall, form memories and so on.

And this ability to focus also gets us into trouble.

The following are all examples of trance states:

- ✓ Anger
- ✓ Depression
- ✓ High Anxiety or Panic
- ✓ Obsessive or Compulsive Behaviour
- ✓ Addictive Behaviour

If you narrow down your focus of attention onto something that scares or depresses you for an extended period, you will not feel good!

It has been shown that people with phobias are almost always great hypnotic subjects! If they weren't, they wouldn't be able to create and maintain a phobic response as it requires a narrowed focus of attention.

The phobia acts just like a 'post hypnotic suggestion' on a stage show. The hypnotist says 'When I click my fingers, you'll dance like Elvis'. The spider 'says' 'When you see me, you'll have a high anxiety response'.

Negative self-hypnosis

Imagine for a moment that you have been told you have to speak in front of 100 people next Wednesday. If you are an under-confident public speaker, you might start with the negative self-hypnosis right away. (If you are, you might want to have a look at our [Public speaking tips](#) article.) It would go something like this:

1. Be aware of next Wednesday approaching.
2. Focus your attention inward.
3. Imagine being on stage.
4. Imagine a hostile audience.
5. Feel anxious and hence create an association between the event and anxiety.

This might only last for a split second but you're still training your unconscious mind to respond to the event with anxiety. The many subsequent repetitions of this neat piece of self-hypnosis serve to perfectly reinforce the effect.

And lo and behold, when you stand up to speak, your unconscious mind is very well trained. It says: 'Hey! We've been here before and we know what response is required'.

A big part of your mental rehearsal has been to feel fear. You have, through self-hypnosis, forged an association between fear and the public speaking event. This happens because the unconscious mind works on pattern matching (see the knowledge page on [panic attacks](#)).

If you want to know how to prepare for an event like this (or any other anxiety-provoking situation), our [Self Confidence Trainer](#) should help.

Now you know about avoiding negative self hypnosis, it's time to look at using self hypnosis well...

Using self hypnosis well

If you are already using self-hypnosis in a negative way, then it is good to be aware of that so you notice when you are doing it. It's also important to know what to do instead.

Preparing to succeed with self hypnosis

When hypnotised, a person can rehearse a problem situation whilst feeling comfortable. Although simple, this is a highly effective way to prepare the mind and body to respond in the required manner when the situation arises for real. It can give the subject the feeling that they have successfully negotiated it before, and allow them access to the skills they need.

This is particularly effective because, as with dreaming, the emotions and body respond as if the hypnotic experience is real. You do not distinguish between actual and imagined reality. Hence the fact that you can imagine something scary now and feel scared!

Done repeatedly, this imagination can lead to you responding in a frightened way when you encounter the actual situation. Hence, the prevalence of fear around public speaking!

A quick [exercise in self hypnosis](#)

Read the exercise through first, then practise it.

1) Close your eyes and think about a time when you felt very relaxed or comfortable. You may have been on holiday or with friends or excited at learning something new. Really conjure the feelings of that time up in your mind. Remember or imagine the way the hands felt and notice the way they feel now. It may have been a very amusing time when you and others were laughing a great deal. Notice what it's like to recapture something of that feeling.

2) Now, as you begin to re-experience something of these feelings again, bring your thumb and finger together and let these feelings become more powerful. Take your time whilst doing this.

3) Next, with thumb and finger firmly together, think of a time in the future where having these comfortable and enjoyable feelings will change the very nature of that future experience for you.

4) Within your mind drift into that situation with thumb and finger together noticing what it's like to be there but with these comfortable feelings. Notice all the things that are different in this situation now that you are different within it.

If you've done this then well done! You've already started to use self-hypnosis to forge new unconscious associations. And finally, a look at how hypnosis figures in all types of counselling and psychotherapy...

[Counselling, psychotherapy and hypnosis](#)

'Hypnotherapy' is so well known these days that it is seen as something different to psychotherapy and counselling. In reality, hypnotherapy is simply psychotherapy or counselling applied in and around the medium of hypnosis.

But it goes further than that. As you will know if you have read from the start of this article, hypnosis occurs in all situations, not just in

hypnotherapy. It occurs in a conversation with a friend, the doctor's surgery, when playing sport, and in every single type of therapy and counselling.

Therefore, if you are providing psychotherapy or counselling of any kind, knowledge of hypnotherapy will help you be so much more effective with your clients, and prevent you using 'natural hypnosis' in a negative way against your clients (albeit unknowingly).

Problems in counselling and psychotherapy are often 'unconscious'

Problems such as panic attacks, phobias and addictions are maintained in part by the unconscious mind. In counselling and psychotherapy, people often say things like: 'I know it's silly but I just can't help it!' (their conscious mind).

The part of them that is 'doing the problem' is the unconscious mind. To be effective in helping people, we therefore we need to create change on the unconscious level – with hypnosis or hypnotic language. If we attempt a cure purely on the conscious level we may find we can't actually change the experience.

Knowing why you have a problem can be interesting but it rarely changes the experience. Phobics, for example, are more interested in getting rid of the phobia than in speculative wanderings as to why they might have it!

In this situation, we need to teach the unconscious mind other ways of responding.

Problems can often be seen as attempted solutions that don't really work.

For example, if someone is shocked at school when a fellow pupil unexpectedly vomits, their unconscious mind may try to keep them away from what is perceived as a dangerous situation by making them scared, or even terrified of vomit. They may then start to avoid any situation where it might happen – a phobia!

Here, the unconscious mind is trying to be helpful but needs to be taught a more flexible approach. This can be done through the skilled use of hypnotherapy.

When you start to see how hypnosis operates in your own life then start to use it in a directed fashion you will begin to notice the

benefits. From overcoming fears and old 'learnt limitations' to controlling pain and creating more energy, hypnosis is a way to really thrive, develop and enjoy your life.

If you currently practise counselling or psychotherapy and would like you know a little more about hypnosis, you might like to check out the following:

- ✓ [Hypnosis Workshop](#)
- ✓ [Training in Hypnotherapy and Psychotherapy](#)
- ✓ If you're further afield, our [hypnosis training tape](#).
- ✓ If you want to learn more about self hypnosis, see our site on [self hypnosis](#).

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