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Clinical Hypnosis: Not a Stunt, but a Focused Mental State



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The following is adapted from materials compiled by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, an academic and professional group widely regarded as a source of legitimate scientific and clinical information on the practice.

Hypnosis is a state of inner absorption, concentration and focused attention. Employing hypnosis is like using a magnifying glass to focus the rays of the sun. When our minds are concentrated and focused, we are able to use them more powerfully.

Everyone has experienced trances, but we don't usually associate those events with hypnosis. All of us have been so absorbed in thought -- while reading a book or riding the bus to work -- that we fail to notice what is happening around us. While we were zoned out, another level of consciousness, our unconscious mind, took over. These very focused states of attention are similar to hypnosis.

Clinical hypnotists do essentially three things with hypnosis.

They encourage the use of imagination. Mental imagery is very powerful, especially in a focused state of attention. The mind seems capable of using imagery, even if only symbolic, to embody the things we imagine.

They present ideas or suggestions to the patient. In a state of concentrated attention, ideas and suggestions compatible with the patient's desires seem to have a more powerful impact on the mind.

They facilitate unconscious exploration, to better understand underlying motivations or identify whether past experiences are associated with a problem. Hypnosis avoids the critical censor of the conscious mind.

Myths About Hypnosis People often fear that being hypnotized will make them lose control, surrender their will and result in their being dominated. Many people base these assumptions on stage acts but fail to take into account that stage hypnotists screen volunteers to select those who are cooperative and responsive to hypnosis. Stage acts can discourage people from seeking legitimate hypnotherapy.

Another myth about hypnosis is that people lose consciousness and have amnesia. The majority of people remember everything that occurs in hypnosis.

The Society lists the following uses for hypnosis in medicine and psychotherapy.

Treatment of gastrointestinal and skin disorders such as irritable bowel syndrome, colitis, eczema, herpes, psoriasis, warts.

To relax patients before surgery . (In very rare cases -- such as allergy or chemical sensitivity to anesthetics, or if a patient must remain conscious and responsive during surgery -- hypnosis is used as the sole anesthetic.)

Pain relief from back problems, cancer, headaches and arthritis.

For burn patients, to reduce inflammation and promote healing.

To control nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy and pregnancy.

During childbirth for relaxation and occasionally as the sole analgesic for labor.

To assist in therapy with victims of crimes such as incest, rape and physical abuse.

Other areas of application include: allergies; anxiety and stress management; asthma; bed-wetting; depression; sports and athletic performance; smoking cessation; obesity and weight control; sleep disorders; Raynaud's disease; high blood pressure; sexual dysfunctions; concentration, test anxiety and learning disorders.

Choosing a Provider Hypnosis is not regulated in most states. Lay hypnotists are people trained in hypnosis but lacking medical, psychological, dental or other professional health care training. A lay hypnotist may be certified and claim to have received 200 or more hours of training, but licensed health care professionals typically have seven to nine years of university coursework, plus additional supervised training in internship and residency programs. Their hypnosis training is in addition to their professional degrees and training.

Ask if a potential therapist is *licensed* (not *certified*) in their field by the state. If they are not licensed, they probably lack the [formal academic] education required for licensure. Find out what their degree is in. If it is in hypnosis or hypnotherapy, rather than a state-recognized health care profession, the person is a lay hypnotist.

Check for membership in the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis or the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, the only nationally recognized organizations for licensed health care professionals who use hypnosis, as well as membership in the American Medical Association, the American Dental Association, the American Psychological Association, etc.

Further information on hypnosis is available on the Web site of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, <http://www.asch.net>.

[http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/11/05/AR2005110500075.html?nav=rss_health]

