



Your Health

Getting Hip To Hypnosis

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NEW YORK - Hypnotism is the Rodney Dangerfield of the medical world. Thanks to pulp fiction and old movies, hypnotism is seen by most people as part confidence game and part mumbo jumbo, practiced upon pliant blondes and unsuspecting heirs by hucksters, fakirs, goateed Viennese doctors and other assorted oddballs and lowlifes.

In reality, few hypnotists are so melodramatic. They will not put you in a trance that will make you quack like a duck or become a killing machine at the ring of a ball or the snap of a finger. Today, hypnotism is becoming an increasingly popular, and effective, way for people to combat health problems against which they often have little or no control.



Two of the most common reasons that hypnotists are contacted are to help lose weight and stop smoking. But it can also be applied to improving study habits, stress reduction and raising self-esteem. To those in search of better physical or mental health, it's equally important that hypnotism is becoming increasingly accepted by the medical establishment and is certified as a treatment by the American Psychiatric Association.

How does it work? According to Dr. David Spiegel, associate chair of psychiatry at the Stanford University School of Medicine, "Hypnosis puts a person in a trance-like state so that they are more receptive to new suggestion, and better able to control what is happening to the body or see a problem from a new point of view."

Dr. Tom Nicoli, a hypnotist in Woburn, Mass., who conducted about 3,000 weight-loss hypnosis sessions in 2004 alone, says that clients are never actually asleep during the process and that hypnosis only works if the person is a willing participant. "A hypnotist assists someone to do what they already desire, but in a way that's safe and natural and removes the conscious struggle of willpower and force," he says.

Nicoli charges \$150 per session and works on everything from stress management to focus and ability, but he says weight loss is very popular. It could also be easier on the bank account. According to the Center for Consumer Freedom in Washington, D.C., Americans spent between \$45 billion and \$50 billion trying to lose weight in 2004. Popular programs like Jenny Craig and Weight Watchers can cost about \$100 a week. While individual hypnosis sessions can go as high as \$500, depending on the hypnotist, people don't need more than one or two sessions to achieve their goals, hypnotists maintain.

"Hypnosis is fast. You get the information you need very quickly because it goes to the deepest level [the subconscious], and there are no limits," says Virginia Feingold Clark, a certified hypnotherapist in Los Angeles. "It puts you in touch with yourself--your own inner thoughts."

There is no guarantee that hypnosis will help someone stop smoking and there are no data tracking success rates, but there is increasing evidence of hypnotism's effectiveness. A 2000 study in the April 29 issue of the respected British medical journal *Lancet* indicates that during invasive radiological procedures, hypnosis reduced medication use by 50% and pain by about 50%, and reduced the overall time of procedure by about 20%.

Additionally, Stanford's Spiegel says he's seen that "people who are mild to moderately overweight had on average a 10- to 15-pound weight loss three months after hypnosis."

While hypnosis may not be the silver bullet that many people are searching for in order to curb their appetites or cure their insomnia, it is clearly no longer just a parlor trick. If you are having difficulty controlling your appetite, sleeping or just need to relax, hypnosis might help you toward your goal.