

Self-Hypnosis Is Effective at Quieting Habit Cough

Self-hypnosis is a safe and effective means of silencing habit cough in children and adolescents, says a study by researchers at SUNY Upstate Medical University. The study is published in the February 2004 issue of the *Journal of Pediatrics*.

Habit cough, characterized by a loud harsh “barking,” typically develops after an upper respiratory tract infection and can remain active long after the infection is resolved. The cough, which can sometimes persist for years, often disrupts normal activities such as school attendance and shows no improvement when anti-inflammatory medications or cough suppressants are administered.

Out of the 56 patients in the study, 93 percent coughed throughout the day at a frequency of up to every few seconds. Remaining patients only coughed in association with other activities, such as eating or participating in sports.

Fifty-one patients were trained in self-hypnosis as a way to stop the cough. Of the 51, 40 (or 78 percent) were free of any cough after the initial hypnosis instruction; four (8 percent) were cough-free with one week and two (4 percent) were cough-free after one month. Forty-nine patients were followed for an additional 13 months to gauge effectiveness of hypnosis. The cough recurred one to three times in 22 percent of patients, and all but one used hypnosis again to quiet the cough. In one patient, the cough persisted despite the use of hypnosis.

“Hypnosis works by helping the patient ignore the sensation that triggers the cough, thereby allowing the patient not to cough,” said the study’s author, Ran Anbar, M.D., a pediatric pulmonologist and professor at SUNY Upstate Medical University. “Once the patient stops coughing there is no longer a trigger for the sensation, and the habit stops.”

Anbar said the quick resolution of habit cough with self-hypnosis can be very cost-effective. “Self-hypnosis may preclude extensive medical tests, including CT scans and bronchoscopies,” he said.

Hypnosis proved as or more effective than any other form of therapy in curbing habit cough, the study reported.

Patients in the study were treated at separate institutions either by a pediatric pulmonologist or a child psychologist. No abnormalities were found during physical examination to indicate the persistent cough was caused by an underlying physical problem.

Patients, whose ages ranged from 5 to 17 years, participated in up to three hypnosis sessions of between 30 and 45 minutes each.