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Want to quit smoking in '07? Try hypnosis

By PETER MARCUS - January 2, 2007

Hopefully the New Year's Eve hangover for many of you is melting away along with the snow, as part of the great thaw of 2007.

As the hangover disappears, most of us turn to the famous book of resolutions, which for many turns into the more infamous book of disenchantment.

But Debra Berndt, a certified clinical hypnotherapist in Denver, is working with the subconscious to conquer one of the most popular resolutions — smoking — and making it so that those who want to lay down the Camels for a pack of fresh air can do so without pain, torture and cravings.

"What I do is put the client in a light, relaxed state to access the subconscious," said Berndt. "Then I do some funky things."

Those "funky things" could involve making the client take a look at themselves from 20 years ago when they tried their first cigarette. Most people who smoke develop an attachment to cigarettes that can be more emotional than physical, which is why hypnosis can be very effective, said Berndt. By replacing the memories attached to smoking with convictions that the person wants to quit smoking, can result in people permanently putting down cigarettes without withdrawal or anxiety, added Berndt.

"It's not like I put a spell on anyone," she said. "It's a simple technique, I just talk to the part that wants to be a non-smoker."

While most people don't keep their New Year's resolutions past January, Berndt said that 90 percent of her clients quit smoking after the first session, and most stay true to their promise.

Those who are struggling to quit smoking, however, have a very reliable scapegoat — the subconscious. It repeats patterns of being and thinking over and over again, said Berndt.

"When a person starts to change behavior, there is a battle between the conscious will and the subconscious which sounds like voices in their head having a debate," Berndt said. "Typically, the person talks themselves into the cigarette and the subconscious wins again."

At the start of each session, Berndt speaks with her client at-length and with significance to get to the heart of what the client wants to accomplish, and what may be holding them back from accomplishing their goal.

She said that most habits can be broken by recognizing patterns that have developed under the surface of the mind. More specifically, with cigarettes, it is finding out why the act of smoking is causing a state of relaxation.

With hypnosis, Berndt takes her client to an even greater state of relaxation, where she can access the subconscious.

“It’s basically just changing the subconscious programming,” she said.

A pleasant side-effect to the therapy is a feeling of euphoria, which Berndt said most of her clients experience directly following their session, and may last for as many as four days. The techniques learned can be used not only for quitting smoking, but for all habits including over-eating, biting nails, and even relationship hardships such as falling for the wrong person.

Contrary to popular belief, most people don’t fall asleep during the session, though some people do, said Berndt.

The feeling is more like a trance or daydream, just like when driving a car — you may not consciously know that you’re holding the wheel, preventing yourself from swerving into traffic, but you are.

Other such examples are songs on the radio or television commercials. You may not specifically remember hearing the song on the radio or seeing the commercial, but when you start humming it later in the day, it’s evidence that the subconscious mind devoured the jingle.

“The subconscious is always in the background, it runs your life,” said Berndt.

Following the session, each client is given a CD to take home and listen to for 30 days that helps to reinforce the work accomplished during the hypnosis session. The relaxation CD’s can also be used for other addictive habits through a technique known as Self-Hypnosis.

“‘Wow’ is the most likely first word people say after they open their eyes,” said Berndt. “They feel their body tingling, the energy flowing. People say they’ve never felt so relaxed.”