

**What is Hypnotherapy?**

Many people’s experience of hypnosis is limited to watching Paul McKenna making people do strange things on stage for entertainment, and old movies showing people being put into a trance using a pocket watch and being made to do things against their free will!

Because little is shared about hypnosis in the public domain, people make false assumptions based on the very little they know. Hypnotherapy carries a scathing stigma, and only with education can we better understand this transformative type of therapy which has been around since the 1700s and has helped millions of people overcome addictions, phobias and facilitated healing where other more traditional therapies have failed.

Here are some (hopefully) interesting facts which will not only better inform you about what hypnosis actually involves, but may even spark your interest in considering it as an alternative treatment for some of the more stubborn, longer term issues you would like to address.

**Hypnosis is a Natural State**

* Whether we realise it or not, we all go into a natural state of hypnosis throughout the day (e.g. as soon as we wake up, just before sleep, when we daydream and when we take part in certain activities like driving). Hypnosis works in the same way, because like daydreaming for example, it involves altering our conscious state from a Beta to an Delta frequency.
* Where it differs from daydreaming, is that hypnosis allows us to deliberately focus our attention to a specific beneficial goal in order to achieve it (e.g. stopping smoking, weight management, improving self-image, overcoming fears and phobias, improving memory).
* Hypnosis enables us to break undesirable habits, create desirable habits and constructively manage challenges. The objective of Hypnotherapy is to give us more control in our lives.

**What happens during a Hypnotherapy session?**

* Hypnotists often use a low, monotonous tone and pause regularly whilst giving instructions, to deliberately bore the conscious mind to become inactive, thus enabling the subconscious mind to become more active and susceptible to suggestions. It is not for the intention of sounding creepy or mystical lol.
* Clients are talked through various relaxation exercises to help their conscious rational thinking mind quieten down and become passive. This enables the subconscious to become more receptive to the suggestions which are introduced by the hypnotist and which have been agreed with the client in advance.
* Whilst under hypnosis, it is common for breathing to slow down and the body to feel colder than usual, so warm clothing and a blanket are recommended.
* Some people get distracted during hypnosis which is totally normal. Some people get so relaxed under hypnosis that they fall asleep! This isn’t a problem; the hypnotist will continue with the session as the subconscious mind will still accept the suggestions agreed. Most people can relax and follow the guided imagery the hypnotist describes.
* Some people feel a bit wobbly or emotional when they awaken from a session, so time to readjust before driving is recommended. When large shifts happen mentally and emotionally it can affect the body for up to a couple weeks until recalibration occurs, so it is important to take it easy where possible and allow emotions to flow.
* Hypnotherapy sessions usually last around 90 mins; this includes a 15mins pre-talk and a 15min debrief at the end.
* Home practice to help cement/solidify the suggestions in the mind and nervous system is strongly recommended and is essential to the long-lasting impact of the treatment/session. This can involve performing relaxation exercises and repeating personalized affirmations at peak states aka first thing in the morning and last thing before sleep when the subconscious mind is at its most susceptible.

**The Science**

* The brain operates on measurable frequency cycles which can be measured using an EEG; the frequencies correspond with certain activities. The Beta state is our awake and conscious frequency, where most of our thinking, reasoning and decision making takes place. The conscious mind is limited to what it thinks it knows, is often unaware of what it doesn’t know, and is resistant to suggestion and change – hypnosis cannot take place in this state.
* The Theta State is the frequency where daydreaming, meditation, hypnosis and dreaming while asleep all take place. This is also where the subconscious mind is open for suggestive input. Hypnosis allows people to move between the Beta and Theta state and back.
* Around 80% of the population can be hypnotised successfully; 20% cannot be hypnotised at all, and 20% are so receptive that they go into a deep sleep in the Theta state.

**Why work with the subconscious?**

* Consciously humans can only process 7 bits of information (+ or-2) at any given time. We take in information from the external world using our 5 senses, and we generalize, distort and delete it depending on what we already believe to be true and think is relevant. Consciously we filter all information, so it matches our ideas of how the world works, irrespective of whether it is true or not.
* But unconsciously, we can take in millions of bits of information every second, where it is stored in the subconscious mind - this is where all our skills, memories and habits are stored as well as all our automatic bodily functions, like breathing. While our conscious mind filters information, our subconscious mind accepts everything. As a result, our subconscious mind influences around 95% of what we experience (decisions, emotions, actions, behaviours). So, you can tell yourself something consciously, but if subconsciously you don’t believe it you’ll never be able to accept it and integrate it as part of yourself.
* The subconscious doesn’t think or reason - it accepts what it is told so it can accept the positive goal-orientated suggestions given under hypnosis; it notifies the conscious mind that there is new information it needs to act on, so the conscious mind will act on what it now knows thanks to the new suggestions which have been ‘downloaded’, which causes the individuals’ goal to become their reality.

**Resistance**

* Nobody can be hypnotised against their free will; they simply resist the relaxation stage of the process and remain in the conscious/awake Beta state. Nobody can be made to do something they would not choose to do freely.
* During hypnosis, the client can choose to accept or reject the suggestions made because they are fully awake/conscious/aware. Their attention is super focused on what they are trying to achieve, and they usually remember everything that happened while under hypnosis. If they feel uncomfortable in a session, they can come out of the Theta state immediately at their own choosing by opening their eyes and moving their body.
* People who cannot be hypnotised may have a condition that affects their ability to focus or use guided imagery without taking it literally e.g. people with autistic spectrum disorder and ADHD. People with psychosis and certain types of personality disorder are advised against hypnotherapy as it can worsen their condition.
* Clients who do not want to go into trance or take on the suggestions agreed will resist the process; perhaps they are not ready to give up the unwanted behaviour or they may have issues with trust or control. More work usually needs to be done consciously first.
* Nobody can ‘get stuck’ in hypnosis – if something happens to the hypnotist while a client is asleep, they can just open their eyes and come out of the Alpha state back into Beta when they are ready. Clients receiving sessions via video call are advised to set an alarm just in case the call gets terminated during a session.

**But Does it Work?**

* There is a huge amount of research proving that Hypnotherapy can successfully treat a broad range of issues including stress, depression, anxiety, fears and phobias, addictions, pain management etc. However, researchers still cannot agree HOW it achieves this, with some suggesting positive outcomes might simply be attributed to a Placebo Effect. Additionally, not everyone benefits equally from hypnosis, with 20% reporting little success.
* Also, while some researchers may suggest 1 session of hypnotherapy is sufficient to resolve an issue forever, others argue that 1 session is unlikely to be successful and may require additional sessions, interventions, and top ups over time.

It is important to remember that transformation – be it mental, physical, or emotional – is a very personal journey. What works for one person may not necessarily work for another, and sadly there are no magical solutions or one size fits all answers. And yet, very often the process of change, healing and growth can be a channel for gaining new insight into ourselves and the world around us and exploring the mysteries that both hold at their core. Trying out conventional and not so conventional treatments is part of that experience, until we find what personally works best for us.