

What Is Hypnotherapy?

Hypnotherapy is psychological therapy ("psychotherapy" or counseling) that employs *hypnosis* as an important clinical tool.

Hypnosis makes the therapy briefer and more effective. The hypnosis tool facilitates change. Hypnotherapy alleviates symptoms by addressing the underlying subconscious cause of the symptoms. This usually is a *fixed idea* that was fixed in place (or "imprinted") in the subconscious mind under highly emotional circumstances. When a person is in hypnosis in the office, the doorway to the subconscious is opened. *With that person's permission*, information is provided in a language and form that the subconscious understands to change the problematic fixed idea that has been perpetuating the symptoms. Subconscious scripts can be reprogrammed with hypnosis.

Brief Hypnotherapy is hypnotherapy conducted in blocks of 3 to 5 sessions. That's why it's called "brief". Most common problems that are amenable to hypnotherapy can be alleviated within 5 sessions.

What Is Hypnosis?

Myths and misconceptions about hypnosis abound. Much of what people think of as hypnosis is simply not true. The public, as well as many health professionals, have been misled about the true nature of hypnosis, the result of myths and distortions that have been promoted by movies, stage shows, and story books for purposes of entertainment. It's also the result of just plain misinformation.

What Hypnosis Is Not

Hypnosis Is Not Sleep. When a person is in a hypnotic trance state, he or she is not sleeping. Therefore, a hypnotized person hears everything that is going on and is capable of responding to their surroundings appropriately. In fact, hypnosis has the unique quality of heightening or diminishing a person's sensory awareness, depending on what is needed at the time. The key phrase is "depending on what is needed at the time." Hypnosis can give a person more flexible control over his or her awareness, attention, and thinking processes.

You Cannot Be Hypnotized against Your Will. No one can be hypnotized against their will. No one! You have to consciously want to be hypnotized to experience the altered state of consciousness we call hypnosis. If someone were to try to hypnotize you against your will, you simply wouldn't cooperate. Believe me. I have hypnotized thousands of patients. I have never been able to hypnotize any patient who was consciously resisting for any reason until I stopped, backed off, discussed the problem with the patient, and obtained the person's conscious consent to proceed and the patient's full cooperation and collaboration.

Hypnotized Individuals Do Not Become Zombies. A hypnotized individual is not paralyzed, incapable of taking care of him or herself, or incapable of refusing to carry out the hypnotist's suggestions or commands. The will of the person being hypnotized does not become subordinate to the will of the hypnotist. In hypnosis, you do not lose your decision-making capabilities.

You cannot be made to accept suggestions that are not acceptable to you. No hypnotist can make you do anything, experience anything, or change anything against your will. Some people call and ask if I can "make them" stop smoking. My answer, of course, is "No." I tell them that, if they are ready, I can use hypnosis to help them stop smoking more easily without withdrawal symptoms, but only if they want to stop. Perhaps you have heard the old joke: How many psychiatrists does it take to change a light bulb? The answer is? Only one, but only if the light bulb wants to change.

Hypnosis is not about the hypnotist exercising his or her control or “mental powers” over the person who is the hypnotic subject. Hypnosis, in truth, is about learning to exercise more control over yourself, your experience, and your behavior. Hypnosis is really about being helped to tap your own untapped inner strengths and resources so that you can have increased self-control.

Hypnotized Individuals Cannot Be Made to Bark Like a Dog. “So,” you may ask, “how do you explain why people do such silly things in hypnosis stage shows?” If you have seen such a show, you may have seen people acting as if they were a dog, a chicken, a person of the opposite sex, and so on, when the hypnotist gives them the command. Believe me, human nature being what it is, people always do things for a reason. The context of the show (acting zany or silly or absurdly, acting hypnotized and having fun) gives the volunteer participants a sort of “license” to act out in outlandish ways, and let themselves go. It is considered acceptable to go along with the hypnotist’s outrageous commands for entertainment purposes.

Most onlookers also are unaware that stage hypnotists screen their volunteers for their heightened suggestibility and willingness to comply with the hypnotist’s commands and suggestions. Stage hypnotists also frequently have previously trained accomplices or “shills” in the audience, and they are good at selecting only those new participants who will be cooperative. Members of the audience who want to be part of the show and who have possible exhibitionist tendencies make the best subjects for entertainment purposes.

Hypnosis is NOT like alcohol or certain drugs that lessens some people’s inhibitions to the point where they might be more likely to do something crazy. Even in those situations, persons sometimes consciously or unconsciously use alcohol or drugs as an excuse to let their “wilder side” have a night out. That is just not what hypnosis is about.

Hypnosis Is Not a Truth Serum. Sometimes people in hypnosis recall forgotten or repressed memories, but the fact that such memories are recalled does not imply that they are accurate or factual. You need independent corroboration to establish their accuracy or truth. Hypnosis is not a truth serum! Also, when you are in hypnosis, you cannot be compelled to say or blurt out things that you do not want to share. You retain control at all times.

Hypnosis Is a State and a Procedure

In defining what “hypnosis” is, we first need to distinguish between the hypnotic state of consciousness, and the method or procedure that is employed for inducing or producing this particular altered state. These are often confused by interchangeably calling both of them simply “hypnosis.” Because the use of the blanket term “hypnosis” can be confusing, I will clarify the way I use the terms now, before we go on.

The method or procedure for inducing or producing the hypnotic state is technically called a hypnotic induction method. The mental state induced through the employment of a hypnotic induction method is called the hypnotic trance state. There are hundreds of different hypnotic induction methods. Many books have been written that are devoted entirely to the induction of hypnosis. I have written a few (see [Books](#)).

Below, I present three easy induction methods for inducing self-hypnosis.

These self-induction methods are safe and helpful to practice, but please understand that the best (read “ideal”) way to learn self-hypnosis is to experience hypnosis first under the direction of an experienced and qualified hypnotherapist. Then, you can be taught to borrow back part of that experience you had in the office and repeat it by yourself for purposes of practicing self-hypnosis. Self-hypnosis is usually taught to a patient during a formal trance state experience, by the clinician in the office. Obviously, that is not the case here unless you consult personally with me or another qualified clinician. So, the exercises below will give you some of the “flavor” of self-hypnosis, but it can always be beneficial to have several sessions with a qualified hypnotherapist.

My Definition of Hypnosis

But we haven't yet actually defined "hypnosis" have we? Here is my simple and concise definition of hypnosis. It emphasizes the key ingredients that make hypnosis such an effective treatment for relieving pain and changing bad habits such as smoking or overeating.

"Hypnosis" or "hypnotic trance" is an altered state of consciousness that involves comfortable relaxation, a redirection of attention, and active sensory imagination. It is a special state of resting alertness. While a person is in this altered state, that person's focus of attention can be redirected to what is important for the purpose at hand.

Another way of defining hypnosis is:

It is an alteration in internal perception, an altered state, that is initiated at the start of a unique process of communication evoked by an external stimulus that alerts the Subconscious Mind to pay attention.

The "Trance State" and Self-Hypnosis. The *trance state* is a further intensification and focusing of this alteration in internal perception. This "altered state of consciousness" can occur spontaneously, or be purposely induced by the clinician, or by you yourself. *That is what self-hypnosis is.*

Deep Relaxation, Effortlessness and "Flow". The experience of hypnotic phenomena is meant to be *effortless* as opposed to effortful and *consciously* willed. It is meant to be one smooth flow that is relaxing and absorbing.

Facilitating Communication and Therapeutic Learning. Hypnosis facilitates therapeutic learning. Thus, it's a great adjunctive tool in such professions as dentistry, medicine, psychotherapy and sports.

In hypnosis trance, one can be helped to access inner resources and potentials for healing and improved performance. It can help you get in touch with your inner resources and "inner strength".

Hypnosis can help you communicate with and develop a relationship with your own subconscious. In a state of deep relaxation, **with your permission**, a "doorway" to your subconscious is somehow opened. Then, with your receptivity and permission, you may be able to absorb acceptable and appropriate therapeutic information if it is provided in a language and form that is acceptable to you.

In hypnosis, a divided state of attention or consciousness is induced. While your conscious mind is pleasantly absorbed in relaxing, enjoyable sensations, a pleasant memory, or an imaginative fantasy, your subconscious attends to the communication that initiated or continues to maintain the hypnosis altered state. So, it is like you are here and there at the same time.

Your conscious mind may be on the beach (or wherever your favorite place is), but your subconscious is functioning like a "hidden observer". Now here's the clincher: to the degree that the initiating communication (the hypnosis induction) is compelling, engaging, and absorbing, the division or split in consciousness is heightened or deepened. And, the deeper the split in consciousness is, the more your unconscious or "hidden observer" is awakened and responsive to the initiating hypnotic communication!

When your subconscious is very responsive, your responses to hypnotic suggestions feel automatic, spontaneous, and involuntary. They just happen easily and comfortably with little or no conscious deliberation. So when you begin to learn and experience self-hypnosis with

the help of a qualified hypnotherapist, you are likely to have a range of responses. The depth of the division in your consciousness will vary. But what is most important is not the depth of this division or split, but rather the quality of your experience.

A Focusing Mechanism. Hypnosis is also a focusing mechanism and a way of communicating more precisely with your unconscious, subconscious, or inner mind. All three of these terms are different names for the same thing. They are generally employed interchangeably.

When your body is comfortably relaxed and at ease and your conscious mind is absorbed in an interesting experience involving compelling sensory imagery, your inner mind or unconscious mind is alerted to pay attention. This frees your inner mind to be open and receptive to acceptable positive ideas and suggestions. Once your inner mind accepts an idea, it transforms that idea into a reality. This can help you change your experience in the way that you desire.

All Hypnosis Is Really Self-Hypnosis. You may find it surprising that all hypnosis is really self-hypnosis. That is because, while you can be given positive suggestions for change, in order for that change to occur, you must accept those suggestions and make them your own. So, all suggestions that you accept become self-suggestions.

Hypnosis and self-hypnosis are simply tools for making positive changes more easily and quickly. However, like any other tool, these tools can be used correctly or incorrectly. When they are used correctly, their positive benefits become quite evident. When we learn how to use self-hypnosis correctly, we begin to notice positive changes in our thinking, feeling, behaving, and experience. When we use it incorrectly, we simply fail to produce the results we intend or desire. A qualified hypnotherapist can teach you how to use this tool effectively.

Hypnosis is easier than you may think. The induction of self-hypnosis first involves resting, giving yourself permission to be at ease, and letting go of tensions. While you restfully ease into relaxation without falling asleep, you become absorbed in your pleasant experience and redirect your focus of attention.

As you easily and comfortably become absorbed in what you are paying attention to, you begin to experience a suspension of your habitual critical judgment. In other words, your “inner critic” temporarily shuts down or quiets. This leads to a feeling of relative effortlessness as your responses become relatively automatic.

While you are in this altered state, the doorway to the unconscious opens, and with your conscious permission, your unconscious becomes receptive to the information it needs to change the experience or behavior you want to change. Once the unconscious accepts this information, it can't ignore it. It must act on it and begin to change what it is about yourself that you want to change

A Three-Step Process.

1. The first step in learning self-hypnosis is to be guided into hypnosis by someone who understands how to communicate with the subconscious mind and who also is experienced in practicing self-hypnosis. This would be an experienced and well-trained health-care professional who has also been trained in the clinical and personal use of hypnosis.
2. The second step is to be taught how to repeat the process on your own.
3. The third step is to practice, practice, practice so as to imprint the experience in your unconscious.

Now Once You've Induced Hypnosis, What Do You Do With It?

This is where the role of a qualified, well trained health professional comes into play. My book, ***Hypnotize Yourself Out Of Pain Now!*** describes many strategies and techniques and **suggestions** for using self-hypnosis to ease and relieve and manage persistent pain.

In my practice, I see patients for pain management with hypnosis. I see patients with anxiety problems and depression. I also see patients with weight problems and patients who need and **want** to stop smoking.

Obviously, the ways in which I use the hypnosis tool are different as a function of the presenting problem and the type of person who has the problem. I help most people **STOP SMOKING IN ONE VISIT**. Weight issues can typically be handled successfully as far as what we do in **three** visits. Simple habits such as nail biting take one visit.

More complex problems such as anxieties, phobias, posttraumatic stress, panic disorder, and depression take more visits. However, since I practice **Brief Clinical Hypnosis** and **Brief Hypnoanalysis**, most problems I help people with can be usually treated in 5 to 10 visits.

Choosing the Right Hypnotherapist

If you decide that you want to see a clinical hypnosis practitioner, how should you go about finding someone who is qualified? You can begin by inquiring with your local psychological, medical, dental, or other health-care discipline society in the area where you live. The Yellow Pages may not be the best source for identifying qualified hypnosis practitioners.

Do Your Homework

When choosing a qualified clinical hypnosis practitioner, it's best to make sure you'll be working with someone who is properly trained and with whom you're comfortable.

Consumer Beware. The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH), the largest national organization of licensed health professionals who use hypnosis, advises on its official Web site (<http://www.asch.net>) that, just as in choosing any health professional, you exercise care in selecting a clinical hypnosis practitioner. Unfortunately, the practice of hypnosis is not regulated by most states as is the practice of other healing arts. Therefore, in most states, clinicians and therapists who use hypnosis are not licensed in hypnosis. The implications of this are that anyone can call themselves a "certified hypnotherapist," or "clinical hypnotist," and hang out a shingle. Beware of quacks.

Screening a Practitioner's Qualifications. Careful questioning on the telephone can help you avoid falling into the hands of unscrupulous persons who engage in fraudulent or unethical practices. First, ask the person what his or her primary health-care field is. If the person answers that it is hypnosis or hypnotherapy, the person is a "lay hypnotist." If the person states that it is medicine, dentistry, psychiatry, psychology, clinical social work, or nursing, ask if he or she is licensed in his or her field by the state. If the person is not licensed by the state, he or she probably lacks the education required for licensure or has lost his or her license.

Find out what the person's degree is in. If the person states that it is in hypnosis or hypnotherapy, as opposed to a state-regulated health-care profession, the person is a "lay hypnotist." If the person is licensed in one of the above health-care fields, check for membership in the major professional organization for their field (for instance, the American Medical Association, American Dental Association, American Psychological Association, National Association of Social Workers, etc.). Also, check for membership in the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis or the Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis. These are the only nationally recognized organizations in the United States for licensed health-care professionals using hypnosis. If you have doubts about the person's qualifications, keep looking.

There is properly no health professional who is just a “hypnotist” or “hypnotherapist.” This would be analogous to there being a health professional called a “scalpelist.” Obviously, that would be absurd. A surgeon’s scalpel is only a tool, and the use of the scalpel by itself is certainly not treatment! So, there is no valid health-care professional called a “scalpelist.”

Your best bet in choosing a hypnosis practitioner is to choose:

- a. Someone you feel comfortable with, and
- b. Someone who is a licensed health professional and who has appropriate training and experience in the use of hypnosis in his or her specific health care profession.

National Hypnosis Societies

There are two major national hypnosis societies whose membership is restricted to state licensed health-care professionals with appropriate training and experience in hypnosis.

The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH). This is the largest national professional association of licensed health-care and mental-health professionals who utilize hypnosis in treating a wide range of medical, dental, and psychological conditions. Membership in ASCH is limited to clinicians who meet all of their state’s statutory licensure or certification requirements for their particular health-care profession. Those requirements vary for each state but are based on similar standards of appropriate formal education, specialized training, examinations, and supervised experience.

The Society for Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis (SCEH). This is the other major national hypnosis organization. Both ASCH and SCEH publish well-regarded, peer reviewed journals and provide training for health-care professionals and students. For full membership in both societies, one must have an appropriate advanced academic degree in one’s profession as described above. In addition, a member must have a requisite number of hours of training in hypnosis provided by an approved provider of such training. A period of documented, supervised experience in the applications of hypnosis is also required, as is documented continuing education that is updated and checked every two to three years.

Professionals who are accepted for membership in ASCH or SCEH sign an agreement to abide by the rules of ethics of these societies. These rules prohibit members from “assisting, training, identifying with, working with, supervising, or otherwise encouraging the practice of lay-hypnosis. Those who do so, and use titles identifying them with such lay-hypnosis groups, can lose their right to remain members of these organizations”.

Certification by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. There is another important credential that aids in the identification of a qualified hypnosis practitioner. The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH) makes available a voluntary credentialing process in clinical hypnosis. It recognizes professionals who have obtained advanced training and who have extensive experience in the use of hypnosis in their professional practices. There are two levels of such certification. The entry level is called “Certification,” and the higher credential is called “Approved Consultant.”

ASCH certification is distinct from other programs in that it insures that the certified individual is a bona fide licensed health-care professional who is recognized by his or her collegial peers as exceptionally qualified to provide hypnosis services in a safe and responsible way. ASCH certification enables differentiation of the “professional hypnosis practitioner” from the “lay hypnotist.” Verification of certification on either level may be obtained by contacting the ASCH national office (address is given below). The clinician may also have the diploma displayed in his or her office.

Where to Obtain Further Information

You may obtain information about clinical hypnosis as well as the names of qualified clinical hypnosis practitioners in your area by contacting me or the following organizations:

The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis
140 North Bloomingdale Rd.
Bloomingdale, IL 60108-1017
Tel: 630-980-4740
Fax: 630-351-8490
E-mail: info@asch.net
Website: <http://www.asch.net>

American Psychological Association, Division 30
Society for Psychological Hypnosis
750 First Street, N.E.
Washington D.C. 20002
Tel: 202-336-6013
Website: <http://www.apa.org/about/division/div30.html>

Greater Philadelphia Society of Clinical Hypnosis
P.O. Box 115
Narberth, PA 19072
Tel: 215-386-5288
Website: <http://www.gpsch.org>

If you'd like to contact me for more information, please do so at:

Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D., ABPP
Alternative Behavior Associates
P.O. Box 6
Huntingdon Valley, PA 19006
Telephone: 215-947-STOP (947-7867)
E-mail: dr.bruce@hypnosisgroup.com

I welcome your communication.

You can learn more about hypnosis by reading my [books](#).

Remember: Your best bet in choosing a hypnosis practitioner is to choose:

- a. Someone you feel comfortable with, and
- b. Someone who is a licensed health professional and who has appropriate training and experience in the use of hypnosis in his or her specific health care profession.