

How hypnotherapy can help people with eczema

Leading hypnotherapist Monica Black explains.



What is hypnosis like?

Hypnosis is a naturally occurring state. For example, daydreaming is a form of self-hypnosis. And how many of us have left somewhere only to arrive at our destination not remembering the journey? Well that's a form of self-hypnosis too. So hypnosis is similar to daydreaming or meditation. It's being in a wonderful relaxed state.

When in this highly relaxed state, the conscious mind is pushed aside and the subconscious mind comes to the fore and opens up. This allows the patient to receive helpful and beneficial suggestions, which are repeated by the therapist during each treatment.

After a few treatments, newly incorporated changes become permanent. When in this hypnotic relaxed state patients can also be taught by the therapist to take control of their discomfort and manage it – resulting in relief from any pain, discomfort and itching, which in turn allows the skin to start to heal.

As well as helping the sufferer to take control of the discomfort and itching that is caused by their eczema, they can be taught how to reduce their stress and anxiety levels, which they will be able to control on a daily basis. This in turn should result in there being less flare-ups, allowing the skin to heal.

Hypnotherapy can also help the sufferer to regain their self-confidence and self-esteem, and alleviate any fears and/or phobias that have resulted from suffering from eczema.

Of course, the number of treatments needed depends upon the individual, but usually anything between one and six sessions is recommended.

For further information, or to talk in confidence with Monica Black, call 020-7419 2211 or visit www.hampsteadhypnotherapy.com

Pain, itching and discomfort are signals. They are the body's warning system, which protects us from damage or alerts us that something is wrong.

Many skin conditions, if not caused by psychological factors, can be aggravated by them as the skin is highly sensitive to emotions because of the close links between the skin and the nervous system. Learning to respond to stress differently, becoming more relaxed and using guided imagery and positive suggestions can all aid the healing process.

When someone itches just about all the time, they can get into the habit of scratching. Scratching makes eczema much worse, so it's important to break that habit. Hypnotherapy and biofeedback aim to reduce stress and also break the habits that make eczema worse, such as scratching.

When used for eczema sufferers, hypnotherapy can be an extremely helpful tool. It aims to allow the sufferer to take control of any itching, discomfort and pain, and everything else that goes with eczema – such as stress, self-confidence, low self-esteem, anxiety and any fears or phobias that arise as a by-product of the illness.

Many people with skin disorders often have a negative body image and so they get themselves into a vicious cycle where their stress and negative emotions can drive their skin condition. Hypnotherapy has been proved to be most effective when used for both chronic and acute pain relief, discomfort and itching.

What is hypnotherapy?

Hypnotherapy is a 'talking therapy' wherein the therapist – called a hypnotherapist – puts the patient into a deep state of relaxation. The brain has both pain and pleasure centres, which are located in the limbic-hypothalamic region, and hypnotherapy has been found to affect that region of the brain.

PET (positron emission tomography) scan studies show that muscular relaxation during hypnosis leads to the inhibition of the transmission of discomfort, itching and pain, thereby proving the connection between the mind and the body. This connection is now accepted by most medical professionals.

Taking control of your eczema through hypnotherapy

Melissa describes how a course of hypnotherapy helped her to face the world with confidence.

Nineteen-year-old Melissa has had chronic eczema since birth.

'Your entire life revolves around your condition and it affects everything you do. At its worst it controls my mobility as when my skin is cracked, dry, inflamed and weeping, it becomes incredibly painful and simple tasks such as walking, climbing stairs or even just extending an arm, can be very uncomfortable.'

However, while the physical symptoms of her condition provide daily challenges, it is the psychological impact that Melissa has found hardest to overcome.

'Because the symptoms of eczema are highly visible to the outside world, people forget to look beyond them. Whether you are "ok" or not is determined by how your skin looks. The problem with this is that while you might be having a good skin day on the outside, you can still be battling the emotional damage of all the bad skin days that went before on the inside.'

'I eventually developed depression because of my eczema and have battled for years with low self-esteem. Social situations would leave me fearful, shy and awkward and I've always been uncomfortable in my own skin.'

Like many eczema sufferers Melissa has also suffered from a lack of awareness amongst the general public.

'When my skin is really bad the last thing I want to do is to leave the house and face the outside world. If I have to go out I then feel very self-conscious and deeply paranoid about people staring at me.'

'Most people will pretend they're not looking, but a lot will openly stare. I can understand people finding my condition strange, or even alarming if they are unfamiliar with it, but it doesn't make me feel any better when I'm being stared at or somebody hesitates to take money from me because of how my wrists look.'

'I can cover up most of my body during the cooler months

but, when it gets warmer, it becomes increasingly hard to hide behind gloves, long-sleeved shirts and jumpers. That doesn't stop me from trying though. There are times when I'd rather endure the heat than be in a situation where my skin is on show. Anybody with eczema knows that heat only makes the itching worse and so, by doing this, I'm speeding up the vicious cycle of itching, scratching and inflammation. But I can't help it.'

It was her constant need to scratch that first led Melissa to explore the possible benefits of hypnotherapy.

'My scratching was mostly out of habit. After having lived with the condition for so long I would often do it without realising, even in my sleep. Even though I deliberately kept my fingernails as short as possible, I was still able to do hideous amounts of damage with them.'

'I was aware that hypnotherapy was commonly used to help people to quit smoking and I wondered if the same method could possibly stop me from scratching and give my skin the opportunity it needed to heal without constantly being attacked.'

Melissa was introduced to leading Master Clinical Hypnotherapist Monica Black at Hampstead Hypnotherapy. Monica and Melissa worked together during the sessions to raise Melissa's self-esteem, to help her to relax and to establish techniques to overcome her constant scratching.

'Hypnotherapy helped me to become more confident in my own skin and to care less about what everybody else thought of me. After just four weeks I was able to walk through central London in a tee-shirt with my arms exposed to the world – something I would never have contemplated before.'

'The skills that Monica taught me were invaluable in helping me to scratch far less and to have a more positive outlook on life. However, hypnotherapy alone isn't the only reason my skin improved. At the same time as I started to see Monica, I was also prescribed Dermovate by my dermatologist, which led to a dramatic improvement in my skin and also helped to boost my confidence.'

'I do believe that to treat eczema successfully you need to tackle it inside and out. While treating the physical symptoms properly is very important, we need to also address the psychological side, to equip us with the necessary skills to manage our eczema.'

Following her article in the June issue of Exchange, Monica answers your top ten questions on hypnotherapy:

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Melissa

Q: Do I have to remember things from my past in order to recover from my problem?

A: Not necessarily; different therapists have varied approaches, but if the cause of your problem is a repressed memory (one that you are unable to remember consciously), then bringing it back into conscious awareness can help you to view the problem from a different perspective and so feel differently about it.

Q: When I am 'under' will I be asleep?

A: You will be aware of everything that is happening and being said the whole time. However, you will be so deeply relaxed that you may find yourself drifting into different levels of awareness. Remember, your subconscious mind is active throughout and it is this that your therapist is working with.

Q: Will I remember everything afterwards?

A: That depends on how deep in hypnosis you are, but generally most people do remember either everything or certain parts of the experience. You will find that suggestions that have been given to you in hypnosis will resurface in your conscious, thinking mind after your hypnosis and these will be the thoughts that produce changes in your behaviour or way of thinking and feeling.

Q: Will I give away any secrets whilst I am hypnotised?

A: Many people are apprehensive because of stage shows that they have seen. However, these are not representative of the hypnotherapy profession. You won't say or do anything at all that you didn't want to. If you were given suggestions that you didn't morally agree with, you would come out of hypnosis.

Q: How do I know I will wake up from hypnosis?

A: No one has ever remained in hypnosis indefinitely. Even if something were to happen to the hypnotherapist halfway through the session, you would still 'come out' of the trance state once rapport had been broken.

Q: Are there any side effects from hypnosis?

A: The only side effects are the beneficial ones of feeling more relaxed afterwards and feeling more positive about whatever it was you sought hypnotherapy for. Hypnosis is a perfectly natural state.

Q: What is hypnosis?

A: Hypnosis is a state of altered awareness during which our subconscious mind is more open and receptive to suggestions that are given. We drift in and out of different levels of awareness many times a day, absorbing information on a subliminal level as well as consciously. Your hypnotherapist will work with your imagination to help you to achieve your goals.

Q: How does it feel to be hypnotised?

A: Everyone is different. Some people say that their body feels like a lead weight, others say they feel as though they're floating away. Most people will agree that it's a lovely feeling because they are more relaxed than they have ever been before.

Q: Can I be hypnotised against my will?

A: No, anyone can resist and it won't work. Hypnosis is cooperation between two people – your therapist will show you the way and you can choose if you want to go there or not.

Q: I went to a hypnotherapist once before and it didn't work. Does this mean I'm not able to be hypnotised?

A: The most common reason for failure to induce trance is lack of rapport.

If you'd like to discuss with Monica how she can help you take control of your eczema, visit www.hampsteadhypnotherapy.com or call her on 020-7419 2211.