

# all in the

Hypnosis has been used from time immemorial to help soothe mental and physical pain and today it is a highly successful treatment for a host of different conditions, as Patsy Westcott finds out

## focus on HYPNOTHERAPY continued

are able to come to terms with and eventually replace old negative and limiting beliefs with new and more life-affirming values. The root cause of any emotional imbalances can also be looked at and addressed while the patient is in a hypnotic state.

### THE EVIDENCE

Hypnotherapy is one of the better-investigated complementary therapies, and studies dating back to the 1950s have shown it to be effective in the treatment of both psychosomatic and psychological illnesses, as well as for pain relief in surgery, dental treatment and childbirth. Studies published in the 1960s also found it to be an effective treatment for asthma, while a 1984 Australian study found it was successful in combating anxiety.

In the 1990s Dr Leslie Walker, a clinical psychologist working in Yorkshire, reported that people with Hodgkin's lymphoma who were offered intensive rehabilitation, which included relaxation (both with and without hypnotherapy), survived almost twice as long as those offered standard treatment. And just last year, Dr Simon Duff, a forensic psychologist from Liverpool, reported that hypnotherapy helped to improve concentration, memory and socialisation in people with dementia.

Although hypnotherapy undoubtedly 'works', the exact mechanisms that are at play are not fully understood. Scientists

at Birmingham University have shown that hypnotic suggestion produces real changes in brain activity when viewed on a brain scan.

### WHAT TO EXPECT

At an initial visit, you will be asked about your physical and mental health and why you are interested in hypnotherapy. Many practitioners use the first session to get to know you and decide what techniques are likely to be most effective, only starting hypnotherapy in the second session.

The exact technique used to induce a trance varies but may include using 'white noise', rhythmic sound that mirrors brainwaves produced when you are relaxed, visualisation (asking you to imagine a beautiful place where you have been relaxed), and counting down from ten. You may also be asked to close your eyes. Once in the hypnotic state, you are still aware of your surroundings but they may appear distant, as in a daydream.

The practitioner may then use various techniques, including suggestion, to encourage you to ditch negative thoughts and adopt positive ones, and 'regression', taking you back to a traumatic memory or event and asking you to imagine behaving differently. 'You can help someone to realise they can learn from the event, but no longer have to hold on to the negative feelings associated with it,' says Darren.

Finally, the practitioner will encourage you to gradually come back to the present, perhaps by counting from one to ten.



*'Hypnotherapy made losing weight effortless'*

Drama lecturer, Jo Somervell, 39, had piled on four stone since the birth of her children, but couldn't seem to shift it, until she tried hypnotherapy.

Before I had Charlie, 9, and Tilly, 6, I weighed around 10st 7lb but during my first pregnancy I put on almost four stone. Although I lost a couple of stone before getting pregnant again, I piled it all back on during the pregnancy and never managed to lose it.

At 14st 7lb stone and with my fortieth birthday on the horizon I was determined to get back into shape, but I couldn't do it on my own. A friend suggested I visit a hypnotherapist, Monica Black at Hampstead Hypnotherapy ([www.hampsteadhypnotherapy.com](http://www.hampsteadhypnotherapy.com)).

I was anxious because I didn't know quite what to expect and was afraid of being out of control. Monica put me at ease and explained that that at no point would this be the case.

'She didn't hypnotise me that first session but instead talked about my eating habits and suggested keeping a diary of everything I ate for two weeks. I soon realised why the weight had piled on. I wasn't really eating properly but grabbing quick fixes and eating the children's leftovers. At my next session Monica hypnotised me. It was a really pleasant sensation, like being in a daydream.

'While I was "under" Monica helped me to think about my relationship with food and encouraged me to let go of the emotions that were behind my overeating. She also suggested that I might find I no longer needed to eat unless I was hungry.

'After that session I literally changed my eating habits overnight and lost four pounds in that first week. During the four following sessions the weight started rolling off. Today I'm 11st 5lb, so I've just under a stone to go before I am at my pre-baby weight. Best of all, unlike other weight loss regimes, I have found it totally effortless.

### FACTFILE

**COST** Expect to pay between £60 and £120 a session, depending on where you live (you will pay more in London) and which clinic you visit.

### HOW MANY SESSIONS?

Treatment may consist of several one- or two-hour sessions. The number required will depend on your problem.

**COMPATIBILITY** Hypnotherapy is compatible with both orthodox and complementary therapies.

However, if you suffer from severe mental health problems or epilepsy, you should consult your GP before embarking on hypnotherapy.

### To find out more, contact:

- The Hypnotherapy Association, [www.thehypnotherapyassociation.co.uk](http://www.thehypnotherapyassociation.co.uk), tel 01257 262124
- The UK Confederation of Hypnotherapy Organisations (UKCHO), [www.ukcho.co.uk](http://www.ukcho.co.uk), tel 0800 952 0560
- Darren Marks, [www.hypnotherapy-london.info](http://www.hypnotherapy-london.info)