

Hypnotism is more than mere entertainment – it's now available on the NHS, and can help with weight problems, addictions and IBS, as well as easing anxiety and phobias. It can even heal childhood traumas for a happier life. So look into my eyes...

Hypnotise yourself healthy

When pop singer Lily Allen slimmed down to a petite size eight, it wasn't down to quick-fix diet pills or a faddy eating plan. Instead, Lily relied on hypno-techniques that helped her find the motivation to exercise. 'After the hypnotism, I want to go to the gym every day, otherwise I feel really bad,' she said. 'I just want to get more toned and healthy. I've never been happier.'

Slimming by hypnosis is a seductive prospect, and Lily's success has brought this technique into the spotlight as a tool to help us lead healthier lives. Hypnosis has long been thought of as a stage act, where hypnotists would embarrass audience members by turning them into clucking chickens or neighing horses. But hypnotherapy is now a recognised treatment for a range of addictions, such as smoking, and phobias like fear of flying. It's also gaining credibility within mainstream medicine, particularly for long-term health problems such as IBS and as an effective method of pain management.

So how can hypnotherapy help? The actual process involves putting the patient into a trance state, using a series of instructions known as hypnotic induction.

'Hypnotherapy is based on the belief that our conscious and unconscious minds govern our health and well-being,' says Zoe Clews, a qualified hypnotherapist and neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) practitioner. 'Through a series of relaxation techniques, you're able to access deep-seated emotions or memories. This also allows the patient to manifest changes and be open to new behavioural patterns.'

Sessions can cost about £40 each, and six sessions are usually recommended. 'Most people only need this number to overcome their old habits,' Zoe says, 'although that depends on what we're treating.' With such a short turnaround for results, it's a form of therapy that could be beneficial for a whole range of ailments.

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HOW HYPNOSIS CAN HELP YOU

Irritable bowel syndrome

For the thousands of people in the UK who suffer from irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) and other digestive problems, hypnotherapy may be the answer to relieving their condition. Gut-directed hypnotherapy (GDH) was introduced to the NHS in 1995 by hypnotist Elizabeth Taylor, and it works by teaching patients to visualise unravelling any knots or blockages in their gut and calming their digestive system.

'Gut-directed hypnotherapy has been used for many years to treat IBS, and there are a number of controlled trials to show that it can be very successful,' says hypnotherapist Sophie Lee. Researchers at Manchester's Withington Hospital found that hypnotherapy helped 71 per cent of IBS patients – and its effects lasted up to five years after treatment.

'During a gut-directed hypnotherapy session, the patient is drawn into a very relaxed, altered state of consciousness,' says Sophie. 'In this state, they are receptive to suggestions that their gut is healing.'

A therapist might talk about imagining feelings of healing warmth flowing through the abdomen, or they might ask you to picture your digestive system as a flowing, calm river. 'Over time, these suggestions can relax the spasms of an IBS gut and significantly reduce the symptoms of diarrhoea, constipation and pain that can be so draining to live with,' Sophie explains.

For Priscilla Healy, 27, GDH helped her to deal with the pain, bloating and constipation caused by IBS. 'Life has improved immensely through hypnotherapy, plus it's also helped me to understand my body and what can trigger pain,' she says. 'I had my first pain-free holiday in seven years recently. Before having hypnotherapy, I could never have gone away without experiencing IBS attacks.'

'Even though I felt a little sore and bloated on the second day of my holiday, I practised my breathing techniques, and within an hour the pain had disappeared. After that, I was

Lift yourself free of chronic pain



perfectly healthy for the rest of the holiday – which was a great relief.'

• For more information on hypnotherapists who specialise in GDH, visit www.irritable-bowel-syndrome.ws/gut-directed-hypnotherapy.htm

Back pain and arthritis

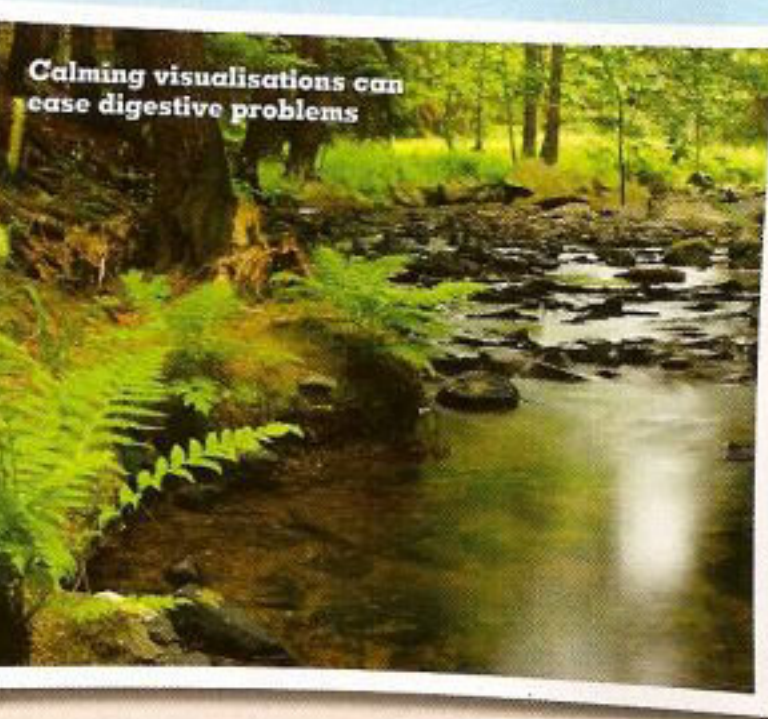
One in six Britons will see a doctor about back pain at some point in their lives, at a cost of £480 million a year to the NHS and £10 billion every year in lost productivity and sickness benefits. But the good news is that you don't have to grin and bear it – there are ways to manage back pain, says leading clinical hypnotherapist Monica Black.

'Pain is our body's way of telling us that there's something wrong,' Monica explains. 'Hypnotherapy works not by diminishing the pain but by lessening the number of pain messages you receive.'

Although hypnotherapy can't actually treat the pain, it does treat your response to it. 'So your body may be sore and stiff, but your brain isn't receiving those messages, meaning you have a better quality of life,' Monica says.

For Ray Langley, hypnotherapy meant he was able to control the crippling back pain he'd suffered from for more than five years. 'I work in the theatre as a set dresser, so it's vital that I'm nimble and mobile,' he says. 'But my back pain meant I was facing long periods of time out of work. After just three sessions, I learnt how to relax my body and my aching muscles, and enter a space that meant I was virtually pain-free. Although I do still get pain, it no longer immobilises me, as long as I practise my breathing and relaxation techniques.'

Monica first treats the pain messages, then teaches patients to intercept these messages themselves with the help of breathing →



Calming visualisations can ease digestive problems

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Hypnotherapy can help with natural birthing



and relaxation exercises. 'While I recommend six sessions to my clients, I have never actually had to treat anybody for that final session, as they're 100 per cent better by then,' she says.

• For more about Monica's work, visit www.hampsteadhypnotherapy.com