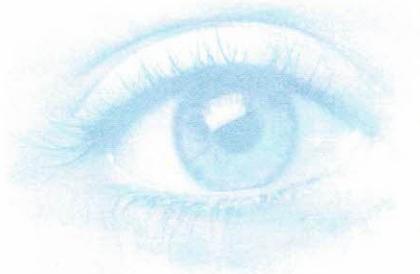


Mindfield



If you thought hypnotherapy was about making seemingly sane people do chicken impersonations you have a lot to learn as did SNEZNA KEREKOVIC when she underwent hypnosis

Let's do a story on hypnotherapy. It sounded like a great idea until I was the one left to do it. Not that I'm a control freak, but the thoughts of being completely under someone else's control made me so uneasy that I kept putting off the inevitable. Flashbacks of movies where people under hypnosis discovered distressing and disturbing facts about their past or even past lives didn't ease my concerns. A recent story on *60 Minutes* about an evangelical nutter who hypnotised people and then made them fall at his feet added to my anxiety.

Finally, I made the call and made an appointment with a very professional sounding woman, Amanda Ferguson, who informed me she was a clinical hypnotherapist. She sent me a tape which she said would help me meditate and prepare me for hypnosis. Having never meditated in my life I didn't think it would be possible for any tape to calm my highly-strung and stressed out mind and body. I was wrong.

Amanda's soothing voice instructed me to concentrate on my breathing and to focus on relaxing every part of my body. As she spoke, I could physically feel the stress and tension lifting away from my body. Despite this I was still dubious about the hypnosis.

I arrived at Amanda's apartment for my session. She was very business-like and immediately likeable. I relaxed instantly. She talked me through what was about to happen and said that if at anytime I was feeling uncomfortable I

should simply ask her to stop. She asked me if there were any issues on which I would like to focus and I said it would be great to be able to be less stressed and be able to switch off from work when I am at home. She then asked me to focus on a spiral image on the wall as she talked in a soothing and calming tone. She slowly asked me to relax and to think about nothing else but relaxing.

As she spoke I could feel my eyes getting heavy. In the next minute she said your eyes will get very heavy and will close. I remember thinking I can't believe this is actually working. She talked me through to a deeper level of relaxation and then talked about the need to relax, take issues into context and learn to better handle stress. At all times I could hear what Amanda was saying yet I could also feel a deep

and keen to benefit from the deep sense of relaxation and ease that my first hypnotherapy session had given me. Amanda gave me a tape of my session and advised me to do 20 minutes of the same session everyday, guaranteeing a change in my attitude and quality of life. While I have only been doing this for a week, I can sense a different attitude toward stress and I am learning to cope with it better.

So, what is it about hypnotherapy that makes it able to fix a range of ailments?

Hypnosis is one of the most ancient forms of therapy. Early man first noticed how a snake induced a trance-like state in its prey before devouring it and soon learnt how to copy the snake to entrance animals.

According to Australian Society of Clinical Hypnotherapists' president,

"I teach people how to take themselves into a relaxed area or their own private room in their mind. This could be a different place for different people but it's somewhere where you feel relaxed and happy."

sense of relaxation. I was aware of her presence but it was almost as if it was coming to me from a distance. When the session had come to an end, Amanda counted me out of the hypnosis and I emerged a little groggy and very surprised.

Having been somewhat sceptical, I was surprised at my own experience

Robert Carlon, hypnotherapy is a combination of two elements — hypnosis which is a form of mental relaxation, and therapy through the use of verbal suggestions by the therapist.

Hypnosis may be seen as an increased susceptibility to suggestion. Hypnosis is not a state of natural sleep but rather an altered state of awareness.

Under hypnosis you are more likely to accept suggestions and ideas than you normally would. According to Amanda Ferguson, hypnotherapy allows the therapist to access the subconscious mind. She says the conscious mind makes up only 12 per cent of our capacity while the subconscious mind represents 88 per cent. Amanda says that meditation forms a link between the conscious and subconscious mind.

The lower level of the brain (the sub-conscious state) is known as the alpha state of consciousness and can be reached either through meditation or hypnosis. The upper level of the brain (conscious state) is known as the beta state of consciousness. Amanda says: "Hypnosis can be effective across a number of areas. I've successfully treated people who have been desperate to give up smoking, lose weight, bulimic, suffering from severe pain, wanting to overcome performance anxiety or work on performance enhancement, and regressive therapy to help focus on past issues that may be the cause for problems experienced by a person today."

Robert says: "Hypnotherapy is helpful to most people and most non-medical problems. We advise our practitioners that if there is a medical problem then that person should have a referral from their doctor or be referred to a doctor."

According to Robert, hypnotherapy can be very helpful in pain control. He says: "There's been a lot of work done with hypnotherapy with people who have terminal cancer in helping them to control their pain. I have also worked with a lot of women in the final stages of their pregnancy to teach them how to get through the birth by controlling pain. In these circumstances hypnotherapy can help people to relax by setting up a blockage in their mind to control the pain."

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There are many techniques which can be used by hypnotherapists and

one which has received much attention is regressive therapy.

Amanda explains that regressive therapy is used where there is a possibility that a client's problems today may be the result of an event or traumatic period in their childhood. She says regressive therapy is used to take the client back to a childhood state.

For example, she had a male client who was very unhappy and extremely stressed with a lack of direction in his life. By using regressive therapy he was able to recall being pushed into boarding school as a child and a career as a nautical engineer when really he wanted to use his talents to do something much more creative. Once he realised this during regression therapy he was able to make some changes in his life and pursue his childhood dream by making a complete career change.

While hypnotherapy can be a useful form of therapy, Amanda explains that in some people it just won't work because they are resistant to it.

In the studies that have been done on hypnotherapy many of them have come to the conclusion that hypnotisability is synonymous with increased response to suggestion.

Another theory is that those people who use more of their right brain than their left brain are more likely to be hypnotisable. For example, children generally use more right brain activity and they are easier to hypnotise than adults because they respond more readily to visual or imaginative techniques. Adults who tend to be more logical, verbal and critical will generally be less responsive. Of course, like me, there's also the fear of losing control which may lead to resistance to hypnosis.

Robert says this is a very common misconception about hypnosis. He says that under hypnosis you will not do or say anything that you wouldn't normally and at all times you are completely aware of what is going on.

"At anytime during a session you can open your eyes and get up and walk away." ME

Myths

There are many misconceptions about hypnosis and the most common are:

In the hypnosis you are unconscious and will not hear or be aware of anything — in fact you should hear the therapist and be aware.

In hypnosis you will say or do something that you do not want to. This is false. Basically you will not say or do anything that you would not normally.

What if you can not come out of hypnosis? There is no evidence of anyone not being able to be awakened from a trance. Some people may take longer than others but everyone does come out of hypnosis.

What if my therapist suddenly has a heart attack and I have not been awakened by them? You will awaken yourself.