



The power of

Can hypnotherapy help you conquer anxiety or refuse a second scoop of double choc chip? Delia du Toit goes beyond the cheesy stage shows

Celebrity confessionals, like Lily Allen's weight loss or Matt Damon quitting smoking, and those elaborately staged shows where ordinary people bark like dogs on command have propelled hypnotherapy into our consciousness. Yet, behind the lights-camera-action lies a centuries-old and highly effective form of treatment for a variety of ailments. Here's what you should know about hypnotherapy – glitz and glamour aside:

Does it work on everyone?

It can, says counsellor and hypnotherapist Betty George. In fact, daydreaming is a form of hypnosis

so we all experience it daily. Whether the therapy works well depends on the person, their problem and their willingness to trust the therapist and undergo the therapy. "Those who respond best are people with active minds and a good imagination," says George, disproving the belief that being able to enter a suggestible state means you're weak-willed.

How exactly does it work?

"By inducing a hypnotic trance, the therapist can sneak past the guard dog of the conscious mind and gain access to the subconscious, emotional and feeling mind," explains hypnotherapist Thomas

Budge. "Suggestions of healing and empowerment made to the subconscious mind are then more likely to be put into action by the patient, which can have profound effects on health and wellbeing."

The trance is induced by getting the patient into an extremely relaxed state, where alpha brainwave activity (the waves that show up during relaxed but wakeful states, such as during meditation) becomes dominant, says hypnotherapist and wellness coach Ernest Frost.

Are there any dangers?

Only to make sure you visit a therapist with a known track record



hypnosis

and who trained at a reputable organisation, says Budge. "Inducing a hypnotic state in another person is not a difficult skill to learn, but to be a hypnotherapist and use the correct techniques of suggestion is another thing altogether, and not something you want to trust a phoney with."

The South African Institute of Hypnotism has a referral list of reputable hypnotherapists at www.hypnotherapy.co.za

Will I be out of control?

No. You'll always be in full control and no-one can be persuaded to behave in a way that conflicts with their value system, says George. Unlike the

frightful hypnotised zombies you see in the movies, hypnosis is simply a state of deep relaxation. Successful stage hypnosis (where you might see your usually shy best friend doing the funky chicken in front of a roomful of strangers) relies on willing volunteers. Hypnosis simply lifts the inhibitions of the person who already has a genuine desire to join in and perform.

What does it feel like?

It's different for everyone, says Frost. "Some go into a deep trance, others hover between a sleepy and wakeful state and some talk all the time. Mostly a state of hypnosis is marked by a relaxed body. Therapists look for signs

like a change in lower lip size, pupil dilation or arm catalepsy, where the muscles become rigid."

Budge calls it his "Sunday morning under the duvet feeling" – that moment when you're not quite awake but not asleep either. "It's a daydreaming feeling where you're fully aware of what's happening around you, but not quite bothered to connect with it," he says. Unlike dreaming, you will remember everything that happened during a session though.

Can it help me overcome my fears, anxieties or phobias?

Hypnosis can be a very effective means of dealing with fears and

phobias (for example, a fear of flying, claustrophobia or public speaking). It can also help people conquer shyness, says Budge.

In some cases, hypnosis can be more effective than talk therapy, as it can help you gain access to memories your conscious mind has forgotten, says Frost. "Many psychologists use hypnosis in conjunction with talk therapy and it has become part of mainstream medical science." Many therapists also use neuro-linguistic programming (NLP) with hypnotherapy, which is a way of using language to form new thinking patterns while in a suggestible state.

Can it help to ease physical health conditions?

Many ailments, like migraines, IBS and insomnia, have thought patterns rather than physical causes at their root, says Budge, and hypnotherapy can be an effective form of treatment.

Smoking and weight problems, similarly, often have emotional triggers at their core – like reaching for that Marlboro when you're swamped at work or consoling with Cadbury's after a fight with your man. "Hypnosis is an exceptionally powerful tool to help a person deal with those emotional triggers and develop different responses to them," says Budge.

Hypnosis has been used on Olympic athletes for pain management and performance enhancement, says Frost, and some dentists use it instead of anaesthetics. Budge works with a number of doctors who refer patients to him to help promote healing after surgery and even reduce pain during childbirth.



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Do hypnosis books and CDs work?

Some do, but a trained therapist will give you better results in a shorter time – especially if you're after a solution to psychological issues. "Be wary of products that make miraculous claims, as these are often bogus money-making schemes," warns Budge. He recommends established branded guides like *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Hypnosis* (Penguin SA) or *Hypnosis for Dummies* (For Dummies).

How many sessions will I need?

Every person (and every problem) is different, but around four sessions is average. Smoking cessation usually only needs one or two sessions, while weight-loss may need up to six sessions. For relationship or self-esteem problems, or confidence issues, between three and six sessions should do the trick, says Budge.

How much will it cost?

Costs vary from R400 to R800 per session and few medical aids will pay for it (your odds of successfully claiming back are better if you receive hypnosis from a registered clinical psychologist).

Do the effects last?

Yes, but in the end you're still responsible for your own life. Just as a doctor would give you medication to take at home, a hypnotherapist will usually give you a few exercises and it's up to you to apply these techniques when you face new challenges. "I help clients take responsibility for their lives, to be the cause rather than the effect of their reaction to events in their lives," says Frost. ☉

"I had hypnotherapy to improve my self-esteem, and lost 10kg!"

Daleen Viljoen (42), teacher

A friend was doing a hypnosis course and needed a guinea pig to be hypnotised by her instructor. I was very sceptical, especially because I'm religious, and was worried that I might be manipulated. My friend convinced me to try it as a means to address my low self-esteem. During the session I was in complete control, it just felt like the most wonderful day-dream – I felt so content. I didn't feel any different afterwards. Then, a month later, I realised I hadn't cried once during what would normally have been a very difficult time for me. I was so positive. My self-worth was also linked to my weight problems and now, three months on, I've lost 10kg! I couldn't be happier.

"I quit smoking after just one session"

Jade Bush (23), owner of a tour company

I'd never been a heavy smoker, but it had gotten to a point where I wanted to quit. I'll admit I was sceptical and worried that I'd be out of control. The therapist was friendly and professional though and soon put me at ease. Being "under" feels like sleeping, but you can still talk. I haven't smoked since. I'd definitely recommend it.

Bios on experts:

THOMAS BUDGE is a practicing hypnotherapist and instructor in Jo'burg and lecturer for the SA Institute of Hypnotism. He specialises in weight management and dealing with addictive and compulsive behaviour. www.startliving.co.za

BETTY GEORGE is a qualified counsellor, hypnotherapist and neuro-linguistic practitioner based in Cape Town. She has over 10 years' experience and has a special interest in addressing psychological issues through hypnotherapy. bettygeorge@mwebbiz.co.za

ERNEST FROST is a hypnotherapist and wellness coach who practices in Jo'burg. His specific hypnosis interests include phobias, traumas, childhood regression and instilling new beliefs. www.ernestfrostnlp.co.za