

Self-Hypnosis

Overview

Hypnosis is a state of inner absorption, concentration and focused attention. This focus allows us to use the potential of the mind for specific goals like blocking pain or reducing inflammation. This cannot be done without the patient's cooperation and there is no truth in the popular misconception that hypnosis results in a loss of control. Contrarily, hypnosis works by empowering the patient to gain control over a specific condition. All hypnosis is self-hypnosis.

There are many different techniques for accessing this subconscious influence on the body, but for practicality we will focus on one tool that primary care practitioners can use and modify to meet the needs of their patients. This tool requires 5 main principles.

1. Education
2. Tailoring to patients' beliefs/interests/needs
3. Trance induction
4. Utilization of trance directed towards a specific goal
5. Re-alerting (coming out of trance)

Education

Time must be taken to educate the patient regarding hypnosis to remove fear and misunderstanding. The first task is to define trance. This is a heightened state of attention where the body is more prone to suggestion. Emphasize to the patient that everyone has experienced trances many times. Examples would be daydreaming or a driving trance where you arrive home and can't remember the drive because the mind was focused on other thoughts. Being absorbed in a good movie offers an excellent example. While focusing on

the film, we are less aware of things happening near by and more responsive to suggestions that are offered. One might jump if startled or cry if saddened. The ability of the movie to provoke these physical responses usually correlates with how well it does at the box office. The patient is always in control and can go and get popcorn if s/he wishes. A good movie or hypnosis session involves three factors: absorption, dissociation and suggestibility. Through an induction technique the subject becomes fully absorbed in the matter at hand resulting in dissociation from various distractions. This creates a heightened state of awareness that allows the person to be more receptive to suggestions that can influence physical change. Educating the patient regarding the purpose of hypnosis will help remove fear and confusion and result in a better clinical response.

Tailoring

The talented hypnotherapist will tailor the hypnotic technique to each individual's unique needs. Since most practitioners using this reference won't have this experience, we will focus on a few questions that can easily be remembered, helping tailor the hypnosis to the patient's beliefs and interests. The more the technique relates to these beliefs, the more accepted and useful it will be. In contrast, if a technique is used that encourages an image that is associated with anger or fear, the process will be counterproductive.

Questions that will help tailor the hypnosis:

- ☐ Name a favorite place where you feel comfort and a sense of peace.
- ☐ What is your favorite color?
- ☐ What are some of your favorite activities?



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Trance Induction

It will be helpful if you can walk the patient through this so s/he feels comfortable doing it independently. Children can do this very easily, but adults often need a little practice.

There are many different techniques for trance induction. It is helpful to use a trigger to tell the body it is time to relax and focus. The finger technique is one that is easy to perform.

➤ **Finger technique to trigger trance**

Have the patient press the tips of the thumb and index finger together making the “OK” sign. After pressing firmly, direct the patient to take a deep breath and hold for a count of five. With exhalation have her/him release the fingers. This acts as a signal for the body to relax and go into trance. This can be used at any time by the patient for self-hypnosis.

➤ **Using the image of a staircase to induce relaxation and deepen trance.**

Imagining a beautiful staircase with ten steps allows us to use each step to help focus on relaxing a different part of the body as we have the patient descend to a favorite place. In the {} brackets, insert favorite things that were asked about during tailoring such as favorite place or color.

This may go something like this:

Imagine a beautiful {favorite color} staircase that has ten steps. These ten steps lead to a peaceful and relaxing {favorite place}. In a moment I am going to start counting backwards from 10 to 1. After each step we will focus on a different part of your body allowing yourself to gently relax deeper and deeper with each step.

As you start at the top of the staircase, allow each exhalation to release any tension or strain in your body.

10...Relax your face and jaw letting your tongue gently rest at the floor of your mouth.

9...Relax your temples, eyes and eyelids as we step down to

8...Relaxing the back of your neck and shoulders, simply letting go...

7...Relax your arms knowing that there is nothing for them to do

6...Relax your chest, with each rise and fall of the breath

5...Relax your abdomen setting the muscles free

4...Relax your pelvis allowing it to sink into the chair

3...Relax your legs giving them the day off with nothing to support

2...Relax your toes as we arrive at...

1...

➤ **Exploring the favorite or peaceful place**

Taking a few moments to allow exploration of the peaceful place will allow deepening of the trance and more vivid imagery and sensory recruitment. If time is limited, you can jump right to utilization.

With the mind's eye, have them explore their surroundings.

- ☐ What do they see...colors, objects?
- ☐ Do they notice any scents or smells?
- ☐ Do they hear anything?
- ☐ Ask them if they feel comfortable here and if so, have them find a place to settle down or sit.

It is now time to utilize the trance for a specific goal.



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Utilization

This is the process of using focused attention for an active purpose. There are many possible uses. Examples include: pain relief, healing from an injury, removing warts, overcoming anxiety on an airplane, changing habits, relaxing the smooth muscle of the intestines for more comfortable digestion, reducing nausea from chemotherapy, and improving outcomes from surgery. Following is a scenario that can be used for headache relief.

Headache: Cool breeze technique

Cooling the head helps facilitate vasoconstriction. This is accompanied by imagery of warming the hands which helps reduce pressure and headache pain (particularly migraines).

The induction technique mentioned will often reduce pain by facilitating relaxation. Further time spent on relaxation of the head is warranted since tension is often involved in the pathogenesis of headaches.

Feel the muscles in your temples relax. Focus your attention on the eyes and forehead and let them relax with each breath out. With each breath, let the muscles relax more and more. Now follow the muscles through the scalp to the base of the skull and relax this area. Exhale and feel the whole head relax. Imagine walking along a snowy path in the mountains with a cool breeze blowing across your face, cooling your head, your face, your eyes. Imagine a cool and soothing sensation across your forehead and above each eye. Your hands are tucked in your pockets, so they are warming. They are warm. Your hands are warm and comfortable, while a cool breeze and cold air makes your head feel cooler, soothing and relaxing every muscle, releasing any tightness, any stress. Just feel a calm sensation flow through your eyes and forehead. You are calm and comfortable and relaxed. (Repeat if needed)

Re-alerting

The process of re-alerting involves not only speech but also tone of voice. As you get closer to having the patient open the eyes, the tone of your voice should rise accordingly. Re-alerting can simply be a reversal of the induction technique; climbing up the staircase with energy coming back into the relaxed muscles. Effort should be taken to empower the patient to feel comfortable using the technique when needed in the future.

In a moment we will climb the staircase, counting each step. Afterwards you will be happy that you have learned self-hypnosis. You will be pleased because you realize that you can visit this place when you wish, having the power to influence your condition when needed.

- 1...As you proceed up the first step, allow the energy to re-enter your body starting at your toes...*
- 2...And now allow it to flow up your legs...*
- 3...into your pelvis as you feel it press into the chair*
- 4...traveling to your abdomen, feel your body come alive*
- 5...Take in this energy with each rise of the chest*
- 6...As you feel it travel into your arms*
- 7...Going up to the shoulders and neck*
- 8...into the temples, eyes and eyelids*
- 9...feel your tongue, jaw and the muscles of the face energize and allow your eyes to open when you are ready.*
- 10...*

Homework for the Patient

The scenario discussed above should first be done with the practitioner in the clinic to help show how this process can be done on his or her own. For conditions such as pain, there is no limit to the frequency of use. The tool can be used to abort headache, for example.



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Note

Hypnotic induction and suggestion is an art that takes time and practice, yet simple techniques like those discussed can be used to enhance care in the primary care setting. For more complicated cases, referral should be made to a licensed practitioner.

Licensed Practitioners

There are many hypnotherapists who advertise their services. Guide the patient to choose one who is licensed in a clinical field (for example, medicine, psychology, social work, or dentistry) and who is certified by the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH). The ASCH and the American Psychotherapy & Medical Hypnosis Association (APMHA) provide referrals to qualified practitioners. To contact ASCH call (630) 980-4740 or go to the website: <http://asch.net/referrals.asp>. For APMHA's referral service, go to <http://apmha.com/hypnosishelp/wanthelp.html>.

Further Training

- The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH) offers excellent workshops that lead to certification. Their number is (312) 645-9810 and web site is [WWW.asch.net/](http://www.asch.net/)

Summary of the hypnotic process:

1. **Educate** to remove preconceived fears.
2. **Tailor** to match the suggestions to the patient's beliefs.
3. **Induction**
 - Finger release technique to trigger trance
 - Staircase technique to help with progressive muscle relaxation and deepening of trance.
4. **Utilization** of trance for a specific purpose (headache, warts, etc.)
5. **Re-alert**. Bringing the patient out of trance

References

1. Hadley, J., Staudacher, C. Hypnosis for Change. MJF Books, New York. 3rd edition. 1996;
2. Hammond, D.C. Handbook of Hypnotic Suggestions and Metaphors. WW Norton & Co. New York. 1990.
3. Hammond, D.C. Hypnotic Induction & Suggestion. American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. Chicago. 1998.

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