

## American Society of Clinical Hypnosis

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### **Definition of Hypnosis**

Hypnosis is a state of inner absorption, concentration and focused attention. It is like using a magnifying glass to focus the rays of the sun and make them more powerful. Similarly, when our minds are concentrated and focused, we are able to use our minds more powerfully. Because hypnosis allows people to use more of their potential, learning self-hypnosis is the ultimate act of self-control.

While there is general agreement that certain effects of hypnosis exist, there are differences of opinion within the research and clinical communities about how hypnosis works. Some researchers believe that hypnosis can be used by individuals to the degree they possess a hypnotic trait, much as they have traits associated with height, body size, hair color, etc. Other professionals who study and use hypnosis believe there are strong cognitive and interpersonal components that affect an individual's response to hypnotic environments and suggestions.

Recent research supports the view that hypnotic communication and suggestions effectively changes aspects of the persons physiological and neurological functions.

Practitioners use clinical hypnosis in three main ways. First, they encourage the use of imagination. Mental imagery is very powerful, especially in a focused state of attention. The mind seems capable of using imagery, even if it is only symbolic, to assist us in bringing about the things we are imagining. For example, a patient with ulcerative colitis may be asked to imagine what his/her distressed colon looks like. If she imagines it as being like a tunnel, with very red, inflamed walls that are rough in texture, the patient may be encouraged in hypnosis (and in self-hypnosis) to imagine this image changing to a healthy one.

A second basic hypnotic method is to present ideas or suggestions to the patient. In a state of concentrated attention, ideas and suggestions that are compatible with what the patient wants seem to have a more powerful impact on the mind.

Finally, hypnosis may be used for unconscious exploration, to better understand underlying motivations or identify whether past events or experiences are associated with causing a problem. Hypnosis avoids the critical censor of the conscious mind, which often defeats what we know to be in our best interests. The effectiveness of hypnosis appears to lie in the way in which it bypasses the critical observation and interference of the conscious mind, allowing the client's intentions for change to take effect.

Some individuals seem to have higher native hypnotic talent and capacity that may allow them to benefit more readily from hypnosis. It is important to keep in mind that hypnosis is like any other therapeutic modality: it is of major benefit to some patients with some problems, and it is helpful with many other patients, but individual responses vary.

### **Myths About Hypnosis**

People often fear that being hypnotized will make them lose control, surrender their will, and result in their being dominated, but a hypnotic state is not the same thing as gullibility or weakness. Many people base their assumptions about hypnotism on stage acts but fail to take into account that stage hypnotists screen their volunteers to select those who are cooperative, with possible exhibitionist tendencies, as well as responsive to hypnosis. Stage acts help create a myth about hypnosis which discourages people from seeking legitimate hypnotherapy.

Another myth about hypnosis is that people lose consciousness and have amnesia. A small percentage of subjects, who go into very deep levels of trance will fit this stereotype and have spontaneous amnesia. The majority of people remember everything that occurs in hypnosis. This is beneficial, because the most of what we want to accomplish in hypnosis may be done in a medium depth trance, where people tend to remember everything.

In hypnosis, the patient is not under the control of the hypnotist. Hypnosis is not something imposed on people, but something they do for themselves. A hypnotist simply serves as a facilitator to guide them.

### **When Will Hypnosis Be Beneficial?**

We believe that hypnosis will be optimally effective when the patient is highly motivated to overcome a problem and when the hypnotherapist is well trained in both hypnosis and in general considerations relating to the treatment of the particular problem. Some individuals seem to have higher native hypnotic talent and capacity that may allow them to benefit more readily from hypnosis.

It is important to keep in mind that hypnosis is like any other therapeutic modality: it is of major benefit to some patients with some problems, and it is helpful with many other patients, but it can fail, just like any other clinical method. For this reason, we emphasize that we are not "hypnotists", but health care professionals who use hypnosis along with other tools of our professions.