



# Integrating Hypnosis into Nurse Coaching with a Holistic Approach

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**A**s nurse coaches, we partner with clients to support their journey toward optimal well-being. Our work extends beyond physical health, encompassing mental and spiritual health, as well as unconscious patterns that influence behavior and perception. While the clients we work with may have clearly stated goals, hidden barriers within their unconscious mind can hinder progress. Addressing these unconscious influences allows for deeper, lasting change. Hypnosis is a state of focused awareness and heightened suggestibility (American Psychological Association, 2014). By engaging the potential of the unconscious mind, hypnosis offers a direct route to transforming ingrained patterns, making it a meaningful and effective modality in nurse coaching.

## HYPNOSIS AS A TOOL FOR SUPPORTING CHANGE

Hypnosis can be viewed as a tool to update the mind's software. Just as outdated software can cause glitches in our electronic devices, unconscious patterns can interfere with creating new habits that support living the life one wants to lead. Hypnosis introduces suggestions that align with a client's conscious goals, allowing them to adopt new perspectives and behaviors with greater ease. Despite its many benefits, hypnosis is often met with skepticism. Media portrayals contribute to the misconception that hypnosis involves mind control. In reality, all hypnosis is self-hypnosis (Yapko, 2019), meaning the client always remains in control. Hypnotic suggestions that contradict a client's values and desires are simply rejected.

Research supports the efficacy of hypnosis for many conditions, and there is particularly strong evidence for pain management. Milling et al. (2021) reviewed 42 studies that compared a hypnosis intervention for pain with control conditions and concluded that hypnosis is highly effective for pain alleviation. Hypnosis engages patients' imaginations to focus less on pain and more on an improved quality of life (Jensen, 2011). There is growing recognition of hypnosis as a non-pharmacologic option for supporting patients in easing pain and anxiety, particularly during invasive medical procedures. A review of 20 randomized control trials found that people undergoing procedures with hypnosis had lower heart rate and blood pressure, indicating a decreased stress response (Walter et al., 2025). Based on their study results, researchers concluded that clinical hypnosis could lower reliance on pharmacologic analgesics and

should be considered a part of standard care (Walter et al., 2025).

## INTEGRATING HYPNOSIS INTO OUR NURSE COACHING PRACTICE

Trust and partnership are essential in hypnosis, just as they are in nurse coaching. Nurses consistently rank among the most trusted professionals (Saad, 2025). As described in *Holistic Nursing: Scope and Standards of Practice*, holistic nursing communication emphasizes intention, presence, and respect, fostering a sense of safety and trust that supports healing and therapeutic relationships (American Nurses Association [ANA] & American Holistic Nurses Association [AHNA], 2019). Hypnosis is recognized as a mind-body intervention and one of several complementary health approaches “frequently incorporated in holistic nursing practice” (ANA & AHNA, 2019, p. 31). By fostering trust and centering the client’s inner resources, hypnosis can help counter the physiological and psychological stressors linked to chronic illness, promoting self-awareness, personal agency, and the capacity for meaningful change.

Presented in this article are two case examples that illustrate how hypnosis in nurse coaching practice can offer significant benefits for clients facing physical and emotional challenges.

## A CASE EXAMPLE: OVERCOMING PAIN WITH HYPNOSIS

by Christine Gilchrist, PhD, MPH, RN, NC-BC, CH

I worked with a retired nurse and grandmother in her 70s who wanted to increase her physical activity but was limited by chronic pain. For privacy reasons, I am using the name Annie instead of her actual name. Annie had been attending physical therapy and hoped to walk more frequently, but persistent discomfort held her back. During our sessions, I invited Annie to imagine her future, moving her body freely and comfortably without pain. This helped Annie envision her intention to become more active. I then guided Annie in framing her intentions as affirmations that had personal meaning and motivational value for her:

- I walk at least four times a week.
- Each day, it becomes more enjoyable, and I become stronger.
- I can go a little farther each day.
- I feel fit and enthusiastic for life.
- I experience the fullness of each day.

These affirmations were integrated into the hypnosis script that I created for the session. That evening, Annie messaged me with this description of walking more than she usually does. I have bold-typed certain words for emphasis:

*The most amazing thing happened... a lot of walking... and my back did not go into spasms. I had the shopping carts for support, but that hasn't always made a difference with the spasms starting. I truly was **stronger** tonight and able to walk a lot **farther**... Anyway, it doesn't seem possible that the hypnosis could've been working that fast, but who the heck knows I'll take it! I just had to tell you because it was an unbelievable experience, still a little tiny, mild ache, but nothing that kept me from doing what I needed to do and from walking further. We'll keep at this because this is remarkable.*

When I spoke with Annie about this message, she hadn't yet made the connection that the words **stronger** and **farther** were in her affirmation. She was surprised, though I was not! The impact of hypnosis lies in a capacity our physical being has for accessing the unconscious mind, which can be understood as a repository of self-healing mechanisms. Annie's rapid shift from chronic pain to a happy shopping adventure pointed to the profound impact that hypnosis can have in providing clients with a tool to unlock their potential and actively engage in their own healing process.

## A CASE EXAMPLE: MANAGING MISOPHONIA WITH HYPNOSIS

by Christy Cowgill, MBA, CRNA, NC-BC, BCH, CI

A 29-year-old mother of two sought nurse coaching from me to manage stress triggered by her extreme reaction to eating sounds, a condition known as misophonia. Donna, as I will refer to her to keep her identity confidential, had struggled with these triggers for years, which led her to avoid social situations and experience increasing isolation. Misophonia is characterized by intense emotional and physiological responses to specific auditory stimuli, that can significantly impact a person's daily life.

Behavioral strategies, such as task concentration and arousal reduction, have been shown to alleviate some symptoms of misophonia (Jager et al., 2021). However, I recognized that the key to Donna's progress lay in exploring the unconscious patterns influencing her responses. Hypnosis provided a safe, effective means to help Donna achieve a deeply focused state where she could confront her triggers without becoming overwhelmed. Research supports the idea that

combining hypnotherapy with cognitive behavioral therapy, a form of psychotherapy for identifying and changing unhelpful thought patterns, can enhance symptom reduction, offering a more holistic and comprehensive approach to managing conditions such as misophonia (Bryant et al., 2005).

During our sessions, I used guided imagery and unconscious reprogramming techniques, helping Donna to neutralize trigger sounds and reframe her automatic responses. In one session, Donna learned strategies for replacing her anxiety with a sense of calm and self-control. This profound shift did not only resolve the immediate symptoms; it also led to long-term changes. Two years later, Donna reported significant improvements, with her misophonia symptoms becoming a thing of the past. She now describes her experience as “life-changing,” highlighting the transformative impact of combining hypnosis with mindfulness and structured coping strategies.



## CONCLUSION

Addressing both the conscious and unconscious mind, hypnosis is an effective healing modality for reshaping negative thought patterns and creating lasting change. This integration of a holistic technique into nurse coaching is a crucial approach for anyone seeking to expand their practice and genuinely support clients in achieving lasting, transformative outcomes. By integrating hypnosis with cognitive behavioral therapy-based strategies, which form the backbone of change (Wenzel, 2017), nurse coaches provide clients with powerful tools to facilitate lasting transformation. Hypnosis is a particularly useful modality in nurse coaching, offering clients a direct pathway to overcoming unconscious barriers and achieving meaningful change. As nurse coaching practice continues to expand, hypnosis is a valuable, research-supported modality that enhances client outcomes and deepens the transformative potential of holistic nursing care.

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