

# Jo Cowley

## Hypnotherapy

### Frequently asked questions

*The following has been taken from the Royal College of Psychiatrists and offers some useful guidance about hypnotherapy, how it works, and its effectiveness. It would be worth spending some time reading through this before your next session.*

#### **What is hypnosis?**

Hypnosis is a psychological procedure that can help to change how you feel and act.

In hypnosis, you are put in a state of focused concentration that involves becoming less aware of your surroundings. In this state, you are more able to accept 'suggestions', also known as 'invitations'. Your therapist will make suggestions that encourage you to move away from unhelpful beliefs towards more helpful beliefs.

For example, if you mistakenly believe that you are a bad person, in hypnosis the therapist will give you suggestions that help to change that to a more reasonable belief that you are fine as you are.

#### **What is hypnotherapy?**

Hypnotherapy is a type of psychological therapy that uses hypnosis to help treat certain mental and physical health conditions. It can also be used to change habits.

Some therapists also use hypnosis to increase the effectiveness of other psychological treatments, or pain management. However, they may describe the treatment they are giving you by its usual name (such as CBT) rather than calling it hypnotherapy.

You can also perform hypnosis on yourself, which is called self-hypnosis.

#### **What conditions can hypnotherapy help to treat?**

Research has shown that the following psychological conditions can be helped by hypnotherapy:

- [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) (PTSD)
- [depression](#)
- [anxiety](#)
- insomnia
- [eating disorders](#)
- functional disorders (bodily symptoms and conditions such as headaches, irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) or backaches which may have a significant psychological component)
- improving memory for people who have experienced a brain injury

It has also been shown to help in the following medical conditions, often by reducing anxiety but also by reducing other symptoms:

- pain
- medical and surgical procedures
- cancer treatment side effects
- anaesthetic procedures
- burn wound care
- dental procedures
- childbirth
- menopausal symptoms

In addition, warts and other skin conditions can be improved by hypnotherapy. This is possible through the positive effects hypnosis has on the immune system.

Hypnotherapy may also be effective for people who are trying to quit smoking or lose weight.

### **What happens in a hypnotherapy session?**

You might have seen hypnosis performed for entertainment on stage. This is nothing like hypnosis used in therapy.

Hypnotherapy sessions usually involve sitting comfortably and listening to a therapist or a recording for between 10 and 90 minutes.

A typical hypnotherapy session begins with something called an induction procedure. The therapist will speak slowly and softly and make suggestions that help you to focus your attention and relax. They will often do this by describing relaxing images such as lying on a beach, or whatever imagery you find relaxing.

When the therapist decides you are in a deep enough hypnotic state, they will begin to make suggestions. These suggestions will be things that help to change your outlook in ways that are helpful to you. Or they might help you to understand the best way forward for yourself.

These suggestions might also involve creating images of desirable possibilities. For example, picturing yourself in a public situation where you are not experiencing anxiety. When you are in a hypnotic state your mind can accept these images without excessive criticism.

It is important to remember that you are in control when under hypnosis and do not have to follow the therapist's suggestions if you don't want to.

### **How effective is hypnotherapy?**

The effectiveness of hypnotherapy depends on the individual. Studies have shown that hypnotherapy can help to treat a range of physical and mental health conditions (mentioned above). A skilled therapist can also adapt suggestions in hypnotherapy to specific problems, and measure your progress across sessions. In many cases, hypnotherapy and other uses of suggestion can provide fast, effective treatment.

### **Does hypnotherapy have any side-effects?**

When performed by a qualified health professional, hypnotherapy has few, if any, side effects. You might experience drowsiness immediately after the therapy.

Therapists performing hypnotherapy should always evaluate how well a treatment is working and identify any side-effects. If hypnotherapy is not working well, your therapist might decide to make changes to your treatment or consider alternative treatments. As with any therapy, it is important not to become overdependent on it, and to work towards a point where you can cope on your own.

