

## Clinical Hypnosis

When individuals are verbally guided into a “trance” by a trained psychotherapist, it allows the individual to focus intently on a single image and be open to suggestions that can have therapeutic effects. It is similar to the experience of being absorbed in a good novel or engrossing movie, and being much less aware of one’s surroundings. Contrary to popular belief, a hypnotized person isn’t asleep and can’t be compelled to act against his or her own wishes. Stage hypnosis is very different from clinical hypnosis, where clients are helped to gain control over troublesome symptoms. Hypnosis is something that is done by the client rather than the therapist, as all hypnosis is really self-hypnosis.

Clinical hypnosis has been shown to be helpful for many medical, dental and stress-related conditions. These include: pain control, reducing side effects from chemotherapy, speeding recovery from surgery, and treating irritable bowel syndrome, ulcers and migraines. It has been useful for many as an adjunct to therapy for weight loss and smoking cessation, but it has not demonstrated the same level of success as it has for pain control. It has proven to be helpful in the treatment of anxiety, depression, phobias and dissociative disorders, as well as to enhance performance in sports or the performing arts.

The success of hypnosis is partially dependent upon a person’s ability to be hypnotized. Many believe that hypnotic capacity is a trait that we are born with. While a small portion of the population could be classified as non-hypnotizable, the majority of the population have a moderate to high capacity to be hypnotized and to benefit from hypnotherapy. Generally, the higher the hypnotic capacity, the more likely it is that hypnosis would be a useful adjunct to traditional treatment.

Professionals using hypnosis should not attempt to treat a condition that they are not qualified to treat *without* hypnosis (e.g. a person should not be treating psychological issues without any psychotherapy training). Until the late 1990s, there was a Hypnosis Act in Ontario which limited the use of hypnosis to physicians, dentists and psychologists. As this act is no longer in effect, there are many individuals providing hypnosis who do not have training as health care professionals. It is therefore recommended that anyone seeking hypnosis should do so from a regulated health care professional who is required to follow their profession’s code of ethics and standards of practice in the use of clinical hypnosis. In the hands of competently trained therapists, the use of clinical hypnosis can be a very valuable therapeutic strategy.