

MINERVA PLACE

Can You Think Yourself Thin?

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Have you been on and off diets for years without any lasting success? Are you tired of your yo-yoing weight and desperate for a strategy that is stable and sustainable over time?

When it comes to weight loss and weight management, many people find themselves in a never-ending quest for something new that will finally work -- a miracle formula, a pill or a daily regimen that's not too painful and fully compatible with their lives.

Recently, hypnotherapy has been gaining positive clinical results as an effective support system to help dieters in their endless battle of the bulge.

Hypnosis is a centuries old practice which alters a subject's state of consciousness by putting them in a relaxed frame of mind, making them more receptive to suggestion. Though the therapy has always had detractors, a compelling body of evidence accumulated over hundreds of years has ultimately convinced most skeptics of its efficacy.

By the 1950s hypnosis had been mainstreamed as a useful and legitimate therapy (ergo the word, hypnotherapy) to treat insomnia, anxiety, depression and addiction. Over 15 years ago, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) concluded that hypnotherapy can help to alleviate severe chronic pain. It is also accepted as an effective treatment for anxiety, depression, migraines and addiction, among many other maladies.

You're Getting Sle-e-epy...

So what is the image that comes to mind when hypnosis is mentioned? Let me guess: a therapist swinging a pocket watch in front of his patient's eyes, which gradually turn glassy as the therapist drones, "Now you are relaxed, now you are sleepy..." The patient rapidly assumes a thousand-yard stare and subsequently responds like a soulless zombie to the therapists questions and commands.

The pendulum technique was introduced by Scottish eye surgeon James Braid in the mid 19th century and was widely practiced for many decades. While the concept and practice of hypnotherapy have moved far ahead since then, this hackneyed image has remained in public perception thanks to its depiction in countless movies.

The goal of modern hypnosis, however, is not to induce a trance state. It is just about making an individual experience a sense of deep relaxation (and usually without pendulum props!).

Okay, I'm A Believer... What About Weight Loss?

In the last decade or so, hypnotherapy has gained wide acceptance as an effective aid to weight loss.

Hypnotherapy works here in two ways: 1) By alleviating stress, it reduces stress-induced, diet-busting binging; and 2) By making the subconscious mind more open to the right lifestyle choices, it facilitates a subject's own desire for increased self-control, for sensible eating habits and regular exercise.

And the best news? Hypnosis is the gift that keeps on giving, because the effect is sustained over time. It is not just a temporary quick-fix diet trick, but an ongoing weight management tool.

How It Works

Lowri Turner, a nutritionist from London who practices hypnotherapy, explains: "Much of the eating we do is unconscious. Hypnotherapy is able to access the unconscious part of the mind to remove triggers and associations that may be driving such eating."

In other words, hypnotherapy helps to identify root causes for over-eating and addresses them. You begin to make sustainable and long-term changes in your diet, which make it easier to keep the weight off permanently.

"Hypnotherapy allows you to uncover patterns in your eating so that you can consciously avoid them and come up with alternative strategies," says Ms. Turner. "(It can also help) heal trauma and deprogram childhood conditioning. The latter includes the need to clear your plate, or using food as a treat. Most of all hypnotherapy can help raise self-esteem, and if you feel better about yourself, you are more likely to treat your body well."

Hypnotherapists do not focus on the diet or the exercise ideal, but they help you visualize the self image (with the extra pounds shed) that will motivate you towards the desired regimen.

It's A Miracle!

Not quite. You still have some work to do. Hypnotherapy is not a substitute -- or even a short cut -- for a comprehensive weight loss system. Rather, it is a

facilitator for behavioral change, an effective tool to be used in *combination with* the right weight management system.

While hypnotherapy does curb excess caloric intake (reflexive eating and binging), a healthy diet and exercise are still necessary components to breaking down the calories already present in the system in the form of fat. The good news is that therapy can help motivate you to stick with both -- diet and exercise.

Are There Side Effects?

There are some common misconceptions about hypnosis that make people wary, many of them stemming from the corny media depictions mentioned earlier.

For one, there is the belief that a person may be hypnotized against his will and be made to do things he would not otherwise do. The truth is that nobody can be hypnotized against his will.

In the state of hypnosis, you are not asleep but awake and capable of resisting the therapist's suggestions. So, as therapy for weight loss, hypnosis will not work unless you are open and willing to try it.

There is also the belief that you will not be able to remember anything you say or do after you come out of the hypnotic 'trance'. This phenomenon is known as posthypnotic amnesia. It happens, though rarely, and it is not an inherent part of the hypnosis process.

A word of caution before you head for that couch: Like many alternative therapies, hypnosis has its share of charlatans capitalizing on the demand for easy weight loss solutions. Although hypnotherapy is safe in every way, do it only under the supervision of a trained hypnotherapist. Also, since there is no one-size-fits-all form of hypnosis, be sure to honestly discuss your lifestyle and weight loss goals with your therapist before you begin.

So start thinking yourself thin.

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Charukesi has written on a variety of topics from travel and culture to health, food and social networking. Her work has appeared in Time, The New York Times, BBC, South China Morning Post, Christian Science Monitor and Asian Wall Street Journal, among others. Follow her on twitter - <https://twitter.com/#!/charukesi>