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STOP PAIN FAST WITH SELF-HYPNOSIS

**When it comes to pain, medication is rarely enough.
Harnessing the power of the mind can make a big
difference.**

As a clinical psychologist, I have specialized for 18 years in treating people with chronic pain. But only after a major car accident let me in severe, unrelenting and disabling pain did I come to fully appreciate the power of self-hypnosis to pick up where drugs, physical therapy and surgery left off.

WHY HYPNOSIS?

Hypnosis is an altered state of consciousness. It is characterized by relaxation, absorption in a pleasant experience, guided imagination, and the experience of temporarily being someplace else or on a different plane of consciousness (technically termed, “controlled *dissociation*”). The hypnotic state magnifies your ability to focus and temporarily sharpens your concentration in a relaxed and effortless way.

All hypnosis is *self*-hypnosis. That is because even when you are hypnotized by a professional, you can only be hypnotized if you allow yourself to be. “Being hypnotized” is NOT about that Svengali type stuff of “SNAP” you are under my spell!”. It is about cooperating with the hypnosis professional and allowing him or her to help you enter into this altered state of consciousness.

To locate a qualified clinical hypnosis practitioner in your area, contact the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis, 630-980-4740, www.asch.net.

A qualified clinical hypnosis practitioner can teach you how to use self-hypnosis (i.e., how to induce the state yourself) *after* you have successfully experienced entering the hypnotic state several times under his or her guidance in the clinician’s office.

The nature of hypnosis makes it helpful for coping with chronic pain. That is because the hypnotic state is the opposite of being in a pain state:

- Relaxation is the opposite of discomfort. It eases tension and curbs insomnia.
- Absorption in a pleasant experience distracts you from and counteracts your preoccupation with discomfort.
- Guided imagination helps to redirect your attention and thoughts onto more comfortable experiences.

- The experience of being someplace else or on a different plane of consciousness removes you temporarily (helps you *dis-associate*) from the pain.
- Practicing self-hypnosis puts you back in charge of your mental experience. This is healthy. It counteracts “learned helplessness” and depression.
- Practicing self-hypnosis can reduce emotional anguish and suffering. It has been said that “*pain* may be mandatory (if you have a chronic illness with physical tissue damage), but *suffering* is optional”.

ENTERING THE HYPNOTIC STATE

The first step in hypnosis is the *induction*. In this process, you employ techniques that focus your attention (for example, on the ticking of a metronome, the sound of a voice, a small object not too far away). You also provide suggestions for producing and deepening relaxation and pleasant absorption and creatively using your imagination in a healthy way. Try this two-minute induction method, which many people find very effective . . .

Raise one hand. Concentrate on your thumbnail with your eyes open (staring at it) or closed (imagining or remembering it). Let the other fingers fade away from your awareness.

As you continue to concentrate, feel your hand and arm becoming heavier. Allow your arm to lower SLOWLY. As it does, you enter into a comfortable state of relaxation. And that relaxation deepens as your arm slowly lowers.

By the time your hand comes all the way down and settles comfortably on your lap, your eyes are closed and you feel comfortably relaxed. Now focus on your breathing. Feel your belly expand each time you inhale and feel it contract as you exhale.

To relax more deeply, with your eyes still closed, imagine slowly walking down a set of 20 stairs. Feel the thick, plush carpeting under your feet . . . the smooth, polished wood of the hand railing.

With each step, your level of relaxation deepens. At the bottom of the stairs, you find a door. You open it and enter the place where you feel most happy, content, safe, comfortable, and pleased (for some, a balmy beach, for others, a cool mountain meadow, for others, a sidewalk café, a country inn, and so forth). Imagine this pleasant place in detail and stay there and enjoy it with all of your senses for as long as you want to or need to.

When you are ready to emerge from this hypnotic state and rouse yourself awake, walk back up those stairs, counting up if you like. You will feel more and more awake and alert with each step. When you reach the top, you’ll feel alert, refreshed and relaxed. The feelings of comfort you experienced will last for some time after you rouse up.

The more often you repeat this self-hypnosis induction, the better you will become at it. It is best to practice twice a day for around 10 minutes each time. Practice on an empty stomach. **NEVER DO THIS EXERCISE WHEN YOU ARE DRIVING OR OPERATING MACHINERY!**

USING THE HYPNOTIC STATE

After you have practiced this induction daily for about two weeks, you should be able to elicit deep relaxation at will and “borrow back” the feelings associated with your “pleasant or favorite place” instantly whenever you need a stress break or respite from discomfort.

Once you have mastered inducing self-hypnosis for relaxation, you can add other techniques.

Self-Suggestion. This method helps you develop beliefs and attitudes that strengthen your ability to cope with adversity. Choose messages that have particular meaning for you. Write them in a personal journal or on index cards. Choose one or two to repeat to yourself 4 to 5 times before you enter self-hypnosis. You can also use these *self-suggestions* without hypnosis in the waking state.

Some helpful suggestions . . .

- *I am in charge.*
- *I can manage discomfort. I can stand this.*
- *Whenever I feel stressed, I accept the feelings and stay calm.*
- *I take satisfaction every day in handling my problems better and better.*

Distraction. Learn to interrupt your uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. It’s easy. All it takes is practicing focusing your attention elsewhere when you realize you want to change the way you feel. You can practice *distraction* techniques in hypnosis or in the waking state. For example . . .

- Think of a pleasant melody, and perhaps, hum the tune in your head.
- Recall a pleasant experience.
- Focus on your breathing without trying to change your breathing as you concentrate on something not too far away to focus your visual attention.
- Rub your fingers together as you concentrate on the sensations, the texture of your skin and the temperature.
- Talk positively to yourself.

Dissociation. This is perhaps the most powerful way to cope with severe physical pain. Some people have a natural talent for this. Others can learn to work up to it. If you can do it, it can work great. If not, there are many other alternative methods.

When you use controlled dissociation, your pain is not gone, but you are less aware of it. Your all protective subconscious mind takes over the task of holding onto the pain while your conscious mind gets a needed relaxing break. Here is an easy way of practicing this strategy . . .

Visualize your shadow. It moves with you and is attached to your body, but yet, it is not inside of your body. It is attached but separate. It is outside of you.

Imagine putting your pain into your shadow. Use whatever image works for you. Perhaps you can see the discomfort flowing out of your physical body into your shadow.

Then imagine yourself floating away from your shadow and the pain. The pain is now in your shadow and not in your body. You can then practice watching the pain flow out of the shadow that is now separate from your body.

When all the pain has flowed out, imagine merging back together with your shadow. You feel much more comfortable now.

This exercise can be done *before* you induce self-hypnosis or *after* you have entered self-hypnosis. After practicing this technique for several weeks with self-hypnosis, you will imprint (or fix in place) the experience in your Unconscious or Subconscious. You will then be able to do it while you are in a waking state.

However, because this method does take some concentration and redirection of attention, it still should NOT be done while you are driving or operating machinery where your full concentration is required.

FOR MORE INFORMATION . . .

READ:

Hypnotize Yourself Out Of Pain Now! By Bruce N. Eimer, Ph.D., ABPP.

Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications (2002). 800-748-6273.

www.newharbinger.com

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