

Look into my eyes...

People clucking like chickens or singing like Elvis are the associations most of us make when we think of hypnosis. Stage shows certainly have their place in the world of entertainment, but in the right context and with the right therapist, hypnosis can be used for so much more than a giggle on a night out. Hypnotherapy dates back centuries and has been the subject of scholarly study, medical practice as well as the mystical, which is probably why it's been regarded with a pinch of salt by most.

How does it work?

There are certainly no magic spells or mystical hand gestures. 'Hypnotherapy is nothing more than the brainwaves moving from the beta (the normal state) to the alpha state,' says Dr Cecille Gericke, a psychologist and clinical hypnotherapist.

'A simple definition of hypnosis,' says Claudia Klein of the South African Institute of Hypnotism, 'is that it is a state of increased concentration, relaxation and suggestibility. It's a perfectly natural state, which we all go through at least twice a day, just before we fall asleep and just as we are waking up.'

'A Certified Hypnotherapist (C.Ht),' she adds, 'can assist their client to heal from trauma, phobias, anxieties and habits such as smoking or eating disorders. Healing is based on the powerful ability of the client's own subconscious mind.'

Myth busters

Contrary to popular belief, 'the hypnotherapist cannot make you do anything that is against your value or for which you have not given

subconscious permission,' says Dr Gericke. What's more, adds Klein, is that there is nothing supernatural about hypnotism. 'Although its benefits are well established, it remains misunderstood in the minds of the public. It is not contrary to the teachings of any major religion and is, in fact, used in most of them. Any thought, repeated at length in solemn surroundings, deepens faith by subconscious affirmation – and this shares commonality with hypnosis. You are hypnotised, to some degree, every day of your life – while reading an interesting book, watching TV, or any time when your conscious mind is absorbed.'

Klein also points out that 'doctors are now more accepting of it in treating the symptoms of psychosomatic diseases; psychologists and psychiatrists are supplementing psychotherapy with hypnotherapy; and dentists are using hypnosis to relax apprehensive patients, and find, in the process, they need little or no anaesthetic for painless procedures, drilling or extraction.'

Hypnotherapy Q and A:

Q: Can I be cured in one session?

A: 'In some cases, yes,' says Dr Gericke, 'depending on how quickly the mind shift can take place. It is, however, not a magical process, but rather like planting a seed that then grows with the necessary water and sun.' The work to be done by the patient or client is also important.

Q: What can hypnosis be used for?

A: Dr Gericke says, 'Hypnosis is good for any obsessive compulsive disorders like smoking, nail-biting, hair pulling, weight reduction (this is rather complicated) as well as emotional blocks and things that are preventing you from gaining your full potential. It is also quite often used by many spiritual clinical hypnotherapists for spiritual growth and development.'

Klein adds that it can also be used for academic or athletic performance, addictions, anxiety, bereavement, confidence, depression, everyday fears, sleeping disorders, pain management, and so the list goes on...

Q: Can hypnosis be negative?

A: 'Yes,' says Dr Gericke. 'Hypnosis is working with the subconscious mind and whatever you put into the subconscious mind, be it negative or positive, can manifest.'

Q: How do I know which hypnotherapist to go to?

A: It is important that some conditions are treated by a medically trained hypnotherapist, such as a psychiatrist. For example, a psychiatrist would be better equipped than a non-medically trained hypnotherapist to handle manic depression using hypnosis, so choose your therapist carefully. Dr Gericke suggests word of mouth recommendations by people you trust.

'The American Society for Clinical Hypnosis and International Society for Clinical Hypnosis have established sections in many countries throughout the world to maintain high ethical and training standards,' says Klein. 'But hypnotherapy is not as recognised in South Africa and has yet to be formalised.'