



Robert London, MD

Time to Try Medical Hypnosis

It's now being used to treat ailments you'd never expect...

If you're frustrated by a hard-to-treat health problem, it may be time to give medical hypnosis a try. Few people appreciate the remarkable power of this therapy or realize that it's now being used to successfully help treat a wide variety of persistent health issues—far beyond anxiety and smoking. Plus, hypnosis is safe and noninvasive and causes no side effects.

NEW MEDICAL USES

• **Pain management.** Chronic pain, caused by headaches, fibromyalgia or low-back problems, often responds poorly to conventional treatment. Hypnotherapy offers relief in 75% of cases and often makes it possible to reduce one's dependence on painkillers, which can cause side effects.

During hypnosis, a patient might be taught to apply imagined heat or cold—whichever is most soothing to the affected area—as well as techniques that enable him/her to feel relaxed and unaffected by pain.

EXAMPLE: A medical hypnotist may instruct a migraine sufferer to visualize putting on an ice-cold football helmet as soon as the pain starts, which can lead to cooling, then a feeling of numbness that can reduce pain. Or someone who has low-back pain could learn how to apply an imaginary warm towel throughout the day to reduce pain.

IMPORTANT: Pain is a sign that

Bottom Line/Health interviewed...

Robert London, MD, a practicing physician/psychiatrist for more than three decades, who developed the short-term psychotherapy unit at NYU Langone School of Medicine in New York City and ran it for 20 years. Dr. London is also a regular columnist for Elsevier Frontline, a medical publisher. *Dr RobertLondon.com*

something is wrong. If you have any type of pain, be sure to see your doctor before trying hypnosis to rule out a potentially serious medical cause. A reputable hypnotherapist will insist on a referral from a

tute a light touch for scratching.

EXAMPLE: In a technique known as *glove anesthesia*, a patient visualizes himself carrying a heavy suitcase. His hand gets exhausted, then numb. When he puts the suitcase

What happens during hypnosis...

People vary in how hypnotizable they are, but about 80% can be hypnotized to some degree. It's a myth that you surrender your will during hypnosis. A hypnotherapist actually helps you to tap into a state of intense focus, concentration and deep relaxation.

HOW IT'S DONE: A hypnotherapist can use various techniques to induce a hypnotic state. Common approaches involve having the patient breathe deeply while rolling his/her eyes...asking the patient to stare fixedly at a coin or other object...or taking the patient through a visualization (for example, a hypnotherapist will often have a patient imagine that he is descending a staircase as he becomes more and more relaxed).

Once the patient is highly relaxed and intensely focused, he is most receptive to learning new strategies to help control his particular health problem. The therapist's strategies are not direct orders to change a specific behavior but are part of a more complex approach. With frequent practice, these strategies become automatic and part of the patient's everyday life.

EXAMPLE: If anxiety keeps you from riding elevators, a qualified hypnotist won't plant the suggestion that you'll simply walk into an elevator with ease. He'll take a more indirect approach that will help lessen the anxiety as you walk into an elevator. While in the hypnotic state, you might be asked to imagine a split screen in front of you. On the left side, you are asked to see yourself riding in an elevator. And on the right, you are told to view yourself in a pleasant, relaxing scene—maybe lying on a Caribbean beach. You would then be asked to switch back and forth between the left and right side of the screen to desensitize yourself to the elevator.

After this guided hypnosis session, you would be instructed to practice the same technique on your own—by inducing a relaxed state and repeating the visualization exercise—for several minutes, perhaps 10 times a day.



family doctor, an internist, an orthopedist, a neurosurgeon or other physician before treating pain.

• **Hard-to-treat skin conditions.**

Diseases like eczema and psoriasis often involve intense itching, but scratching the itch only makes things worse. With hypnosis, patients can learn to relax and substi-

down and touches an inflamed area of skin with that hand, he mentally transfers numbness to that area and can relieve the itch.

• **Gastrointestinal problems.**

Stress and anxiety are often linked to problems such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Hypnotic techniques can relax tension to help

the digestive tract function more smoothly and relieve symptoms.

EXAMPLE: You may be asked to imagine a place that's very peaceful for you—it could be a beautiful meadow or a favorite room. This will help relax your entire body including the digestive system.

• **Nausea.** Hypnosis is also effective for the nausea often associated with chemotherapy or pregnancy.

EXAMPLE: By visualizing inhaling very cold air (from an open freezer, for example), some patients can dramatically relieve nausea.

OTHER CONDITIONS HYPNOSIS HELPS TREAT: Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)...obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD)...high blood pressure...tinnitus (ringing in the ears)...asthma...and allergies.

TO FIND A HYPNOTHERAPIST

When seeking a hypnotherapist, choose a licensed health professional—a psychologist, psychiatrist, primary care doctor, psychiatric nurse practitioner or clinical social worker—who has experience in medical hypnosis. To find a qualified clinical hypnotherapist, contact the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis at ASCH.net or the Society for Clinical & Experimental Hypnosis at SocietiesofHypnosis.com.

The number of sessions needed with a hypnotherapist varies depending on the person and the specific problem. Each session is typically one hour long. Some patients might need one session, but most require four to 10. The cost can range from \$100 to \$300 per session, which may be partially covered by insurance.

RECORD YOUR SESSION

Few people can remember everything that a doctor or therapist tells them. *What helps:* Ask your therapist if you can record your hypnosis session. Later, the recording will help fill in anything you are unsure of so that you can practice more effectively (see box on page 8). [BLH](#)

Neil Schachter, MD
Mount Sinai Hospital

Don't Let a Spring Cold Slow You Down

Get well much quicker—even if you have allergies, too.

Whew! Now that winter is ending you can say good-bye to cold season, right? Not so fast.

It's true that winter is peak time for the common cold, but springtime runs a close second. In fact, a spring cold can be even *worse* due to the double-whammy of springtime allergies.

No matter what season it is, minimizing the time you're sick with a cold helps reduce your risk for complications, such as sinusitis, bronchitis and even pneumonia. Here's what you can do to recover from a cold *much* faster than usual—and additional steps to take if you also suffer from springtime allergies.

QUICK CURES FOR A COLD

• **Don't blow too hard.** Giving your nose a vigorous blow seems like a logical response to a head full of congestion. But it can actually increase the time that you're sick.

REASON: Gale-force nose-blowing forces mucus backward into nasal passages and can block drainage from these passages. An infection that was originally restricted to the nose can spread up into the sinuses or the middle ear.

How can you tell if you're blowing too hard? If you hear a crackling sound or if you notice that congestion-related pressure in your head or face is more intense than it was before blowing, then you've blown your nose too forcefully.

MY ADVICE: Before blowing your nose, spritz some saline spray into

each nostril. Wait a few moments while it softens the mucus. Then give a slow, gentle blow—one nostril at a time.

• **Try zinc lozenges—fast.** There is strong research showing that people who use zinc lozenges can shave days off the time that they're sick, and their symptoms will be less intense.

SCIENTIFIC EVIDENCE: Researchers at Wayne State University identified 50 adults who had developed cold symptoms. Within 24 hours, half were asked to take a zinc lozenge every two to three waking hours... the others were given look-alike lozenges that didn't contain zinc.

The results, which were published in *Annals of Internal Medicine*, were impressive. Cold symptoms lasted about eight days in the placebo group versus 4.5 days in those taking zinc. Lab tests showed that levels of nasal *cytokines* (immune proteins that exacerbate cold symptoms) were lower in the zinc group.

MY ADVICE: Take either zinc acetate or zinc gluconate at the *first* signs of a cold. The lozenges work best when taken within 24 to 48 hours after a cold starts. Take two or three lozenges a day for the >>

Bottom Line/Health interviewed...

Neil Schachter, MD, medical director of the respiratory-care department at Mount Sinai Hospital and the Maurice Hexter Professor of Pulmonary Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai, both in New York City. He is the author of *The Good Doctor's Guide to Colds & Flu* (Harper).

