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Hypnosis: Focusing Subconscious on Change

Learn how hypnosis can help you cut back on medications, quit bad habits, and ease stress.

By [Jeanie Lerche Davis](#)

WebMD Feature

Reviewed by [Louise Chang, MD](#)

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Forget the stage-show stereotypes. Hypnosis has helped people cut back on pain, [anxiety](#), and [depression medications](#), resolve intestinal problems, [quit smoking](#), even have less stressful [childbirth](#).

There's no pocket watch involved. Hypnosis is simply a state of concentration and focused attention -- focused on a mental image. It's a skill that must be learned from a trained therapist. With practice, hypnotizing yourself comes easily. Self-hypnosis is the path to training both mind and body to make a desired change.

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"People who are able to do self-hypnosis can use that focus for a variety of purposes," Stan Chapman, PhD

a [psychologist](#) in the Center for Pain Medicine at Emory [Healthcare](#) in Atlanta, tells WebMD. "For example, someone who is very depressed may realize on one level that life is not hopeless and pointless. But if he focuses on a thought contrary to that, the idea becomes deeply embedded in his subconscious."

Here's what happens: Guided by a therapist's words, you slip deeper and deeper into a very relaxed, very focused state -- into your subconscious. That's when a suggestion, a thought that will help you solve a problem, is introduced by the therapist. When the mind is intensely focused, these so-called post-hypnotic suggestions have a powerful impact, Chapman says.

Don't worry, you won't lose consciousness. You won't do anything against your will. Afterward, you are very much aware of what happened while you were "under." You will recognize and remember the post-hypnotic suggestion. And, with practice, you can learn to hypnotize yourself to reinforce the suggestion.

Pain Control Through Hypnosis

Marc Oster, PsyD, a Chicago psychologist, relies on self-hypnosis when he gets dental work done. "I get Novocain just like other patients, but I don't need as much of it because I'm under hypnosis. Afterward, I can go back to work for a full day. When the Novocain wears off, I don't have the pain, the jaw ache, or the [headache](#) that other people have," he told WebMD, in a previous interview.

No one knows exactly how hypnosis works, but scientists have theories. Hypnosis helps change our expectations. When a suggestion is made during hypnosis, the mind gains control over the body. Focus your attention on an image that blocks the perception of pain, for instance, and you feel less pain. Your subconscious has grabbed hold of that message, replaying it time and again.

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