

The American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH) was founded in 1957 by Milton Erickson, MD. It is an interdisciplinary organization of medical, dental and mental health professionals interested in the clinical use of hypnosis. ASCH promotes greater acceptance of hypnosis as a clinical tool with broad applications in medicine, dentistry and mental health. ASCH offers training and certification programs and provides practitioners with ethical and treatment guidelines for the clinical use of hypnosis by trained, licensed professionals. Currently, ASCH has nearly 2,000 members in the US, Canada and other countries.

Definition of Hypnosis

Hypnosis elicits and makes use of the experience of inner absorption, concentration and focused attention. When our minds are concentrated and focused in this way, we are able to make use of the power of our minds to bring about change. Using hypnosis and self-hypnosis can allow people to have increased control over their behaviors, thoughts, emotional responses, and even physiological responses and physical health.

While there is a general agreement that certain effects of hypnosis exist, there are differences of opinion within the research and clinical communities about how hypnosis works. Some researchers believe that hypnosis can be used by individuals to the degree they possess a hypnotic trait, much as they have traits associated with height, body size, hair color, etc. Other professionals who study and use hypnosis believe that there are strong cognitive and interpersonal components that affect an individual's response to hypnotic environments and suggestions.

Recent research supports the view that hypnotic communication and suggestions effectively changes aspects of the person's physiological and neurological functions.

Practitioners use clinical hypnosis in three main ways. First, they encourage the use of imagination. Mental imagery is very powerful, especially in a focused state of attention. The mind seems capable of using imagery, even if it is only symbolic, to assist us in bringing about the things we are imagining. For example, a patient with ulcerative colitis may be asked to imagine what his/her distressed colon looks like. If she imagines it as being like a tunnel, with very red, inflamed walls that are rough in texture, the patient may be encouraged in hypnosis (and in self-hypnosis) to imagine this image changing to a healthy one.

A second basic hypnotic method is to present ideas or suggestions to the patient. In a state of concentrated attention, ideas and suggestions that are compatible with the individual's goals seem to have a more powerful impact on the mind and body, and are therefore more readily translated into desired changes.

Finally, hypnosis may be used for unconscious exploration, to better understand underlying motivations or identify whether past events or experiences are associated with causing a problem. Hypnosis avoids the critical censor of the conscious mind, which often interferes with the discovery and ability to make use of new possibilities.

Myths About Hypnosis

There are two primary myths about hypnosis. One is the common belief that a loss of control takes place, with the hypnotized person falling under control of a powerful person who takes over their mind and gains behavioral control. The second myth is that hypnosis always results in a deep state of unconsciousness, with no memory of what took place.

While a hypnotized person is generally more susceptible to suggestion, there is little evidence to suggest this results in loss of control. Good hypnosis is a collaborative experience, and can be thought of as an invitation by the hypnotist for the person in experience ideas, feelings, sensations, and physical processes that are different than those that occur in their normal, waking state.

Most hypnotic processes can be accomplished in a light to medium state of trance, where the patient or client has a clear memory of what was said and done.

Uses of Hypnosis in Psychotherapy

- Anxiety and stress management
- Controlling habit/behavioral disorders, such as trichotillomania
- Performance enhancement for athletes, and concentration skills for test anxiety and learning disorders.
- Obesity and weight control.
- Sexual dysfunction
- Sleep disorders
- Smoking cessation
- Victims of physical and sexual abuse and trauma

Medical Applications of Hypnosis

- Gastrointestinal disorders (ulcers, Irritable Bowel Syndrome, colitis, Crohn's Disease)
- Dermatologic disorders (eczema, herpes, neurodermatitis, pruritus [itching], psoriasis, warts)
- Surgery/Anesthesiology (In unusual circumstances, hypnosis has been used as the sole anesthetic for surgery, including the removal of the gall bladder, amputation, cesarean section, and hysterectomy. Reasons for using hypnosis as the sole anesthetic may include: situations where chemical anesthesia is contraindicated because of allergies or hypersensitivities; when organic problems increase the risk of using chemoanesthesia; and in some conditions where it is ideal for the patient to be able to respond to questions or directives from the surgeon)
- Pain (back pain, cancer pain, dental anesthesia, headaches and migraines, arthritis or rheumatism)
- Burns: Hypnosis is not only effective for the pain, but when hypnotic anesthesia and feelings of coolness are created in the first few hours after a significant burn, it appears that it also reduces inflammation and promotes healing. A second degree burn can often be kept from going third degree if hypnosis is used soon after the injury.
- Nausea and vomiting associated with chemotherapy and pregnancy (hyperemesis gravidarum)
- Childbirth: Based upon our members' anecdotal evidence, approximately two thirds of women have been found capable of using hypnosis as the sole analgesic for labor. This eliminates the risks that medications can pose to both the mother and child.
- Hemophilia: Hemophilia patients can often be taught to use self-hypnosis to control vascular flow and keep from requiring a blood transfusion.
- Controlling asthma and allergic responses.

More information is available on the ASCH website at www.asch.net.

For specific information, or to interview an ASCH member, please contact the ASCH office at 630/980-4740. Office staff will provide you with names and phone numbers of members who have agreed to speak to the media and who can address the topic of your article.