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# I Didn't Believe Hypnosis Could Work – Until It Changed My Life

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There are few things worse than not feeling like yourself because of mental health struggles. Some people will never live through this experience. But the reality is, **20 percent** of the population suffers from mental illness. I am in that 20 percent. There have been three distinct times in my life where I haven't felt like me: The first time it happened, my grandma had passed away, and I began experiencing OCD symptoms around the age of 10. Back then, therapy ended up helping me break the cycle.

Then, when I was in a second semester sophomore in college, and I fell into a spiral of insomnia, anxiety, OCD, and depression caused by heartbreak. Family financial issues played a part in my turmoil too, and I felt like I was losing the joyful, calm, sleep-loving person I had been. I had disassociated from myself, and all I wanted to be was the person before the trauma.

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Luckily I went into therapy and (at first reluctantly) started on an antidepressant. For about seven years, my symptoms were manageable. Then life struck once again. Last year, I was laid off; around the same time, my uncle passed away. To say my body didn't react well to the financial pressure and heartache is an understatement. I developed PTSD, my insomnia came back with a vengeance, my OCD thoughts were constant, and my anxiety was paralyzing. I began to dread the things I once loved: dressing up, wearing makeup, going to concerts, writing, and hanging out with friends felt torturous.

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When you're desperate enough, you'll do anything to feel like you again. For me, that meant trying something I had never before considered: hypnosis.

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For people living with OCD, PTSD, phobias, anxiety, or depression, sometimes therapy and medication don't feel like enough. That's where hypnosis comes in. "Anxiety is actually self-hypnosis in a negative way — when you [practice] hypnosis, you reprogram the mind with different beliefs," hypnotherapist and psychotherapist **Fayina Cohen** says. She adds that the stereotypes about hypnosis being fake or for hippies are just that: stereotypes.

But the stigma and skepticism attached to hypnosis mean a lot of people struggling with mental health issues don't know it's a real option for them. My therapist, whom I credit with a ton of my improvements, recommended I try hypnosis. I, of course, reacted like most people: with serious doubts. I imagined someone waving a long, gold chain connected to a pocket watch across my face while I miraculously passed out. But when you're barely able to function, you'll try just about anything. That's how I came to try hypnosis, and how I became a believer in its power.

Appointments with my hypnotist began with talk therapy that helped to inform the second part, the hypnosis session itself. My hypnotist read from a carefully crafted script, which she adjusted each week based on the issues we were targeting. The sessions would range from 15 to 30 minutes, and for about eight months, I had homework: to listen to a recording before I would go to bed.

The recordings themselves don't always make a ton of sense, but embedded in them are

The recordings themselves don't always make a ton of sense, but embedded in them are commands targeted at your subconscious mind. The commands are meant to bring you into a more relaxed state — akin to what you feel when you daydream or when you miss an exit driving on the highway (something called "highway hypnosis"). "Your subconscious mind is loaded with negative messages, so it's necessary to have a hypnotist clear this stuff out for you," explains certified clinical hypnotist Joanne Ferdman of **Theta Healing Arts** in Huntington, New York. "Hypnotherapy is great for managing your thoughts, clearing out negative experiences and giving you empowering messages." But while your mind is taking in said thoughts, hypnosis isn't mind control. "Hypnosis isn't something that can make you do something against your will," explains Ferdman. "Your conscious mind already knows what you want to work on. I can't give you a suggestion that your conscious mind isn't in complete agreement with."

When it comes to results, timing is different for everyone. Some people see full changes — including greater relaxation, positivity, and feeling of control — in just a few sessions; others take longer to start to heal. It depends on the person and the state of their subconscious. According to Ferdman, "We have 60,000 thoughts a day, and most of them are negative." The more negativity you're dealing with, the longer it may take to notice the effect of hypnosis — no matter how much you consciously want things to change.

Essentially, hypnosis is a series of reminders to reduce anxiety and fear, encouraging clients' minds to go in more positive directions when they feel overwhelmed by negativity. Sometimes it's necessary for hypnotists to clear out past experiences, which means they'll do something called "regression" — they will guide you back to the first time a traumatic experience occurred and help you process it so that you can release it from your subconscious.

If you're still with me, and intrigued, you're not alone. According to hypnotists, hypnosis is becoming a more commonly used practice. "Because of the Internet, there's more education that expels the myth of hypnosis," Cohen says. "In the last 10 years, I've been getting more phone calls about hypnosis than ever before."

Here are some things to keep in mind if you're willing to give hypnosis a try:

- **Find a hypnotist you trust.** Do your research, inquire about their training and certification, and ask to speak to past clients of theirs. Confidence in your care provider, whatever their specialty, is key.

- **Focus on your motivation to change.** You may not be fully convinced of the

- **Focus on your motivation to change.** You may not be fully convinced of the potential at first, but if you remain open-minded and stick with it, results will likely follow.
- **Hypnosis is a partnership.** Both you and your hypnotist work together in the healing process. Whether you're listening to your hypnotist read a script or taking in their tapes on repeat, it takes two.
- **You don't need to be actively listening for hypnosis to work.** The commands and messages your hypnotist embeds in your script are absorbed by the subconscious mind
- **You are in control of your session.** You still have free will, and you're not in a trance. The hypnotist is just there there to facilitate.
- **You're not too "strong-willed" to be hypnotized.** Your hypnotist is helping you to hypnotize *yourself*— you're not giving in or tricking yourself into a state of mind you don't actually want to enter. This is something you're doing for you, as part of a full treatment plan you and your care providers work out together.

Finally, hypnosis wasn't an easy or automatic fix. It required patience, commitment, and consistency in showing up to my appointments and listening to my recordings. But I'm so glad I gave hypnosis a chance. I count it as one of the therapeutic techniques that helped me feel like myself again — and that has been worth every minute I've spent on it.

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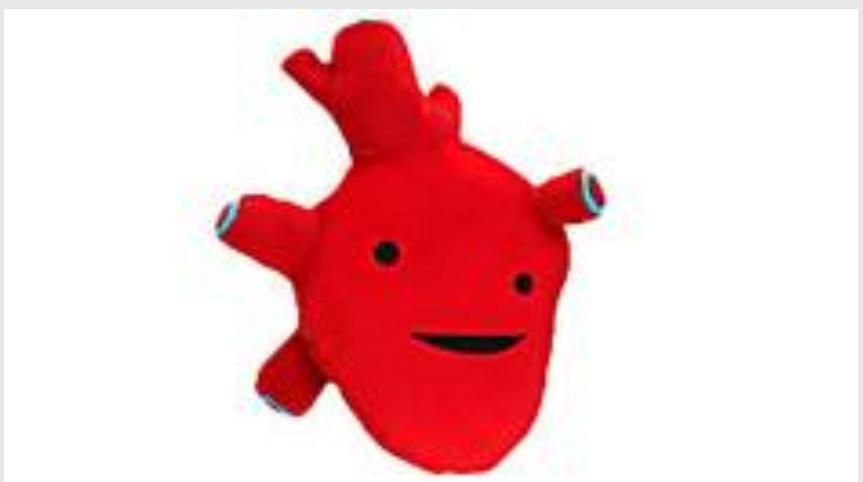
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