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The Scoop on Self Hypnosis

Topics Covered:

What Is Self Hypnosis?

How Self Hypnosis Is Done

What Is An Induction In Self Hypnosis?

Choosing a Prescription for Self Hypnosis

How Your Brain Works In Self Hypnosis

Anyone Can Do Self Hypnosis

Some Background on Hypnosis

Self Hypnosis as a Method of Achieving Goals

Self Hypnosis as a Method to Help You Sleep

Self Hypnosis Compared to Hypnosis by Another Person

The Scoop on Self Hypnosis

What Is Self Hypnosis?

The image many people call to mind when hypnosis is discussed is that of a hypnotist waving a pocket watch or crystal on a chain back and forth, telling a volunteer that they are getting sleepy. Before you know it, the volunteer is dancing around like a fool, to the great amusement of the audience. The volunteer will “snap” out of the hypnotic trance and remember nothing. This is stage hypnotism, and many people become convinced that hypnotism is a form of mind control. In actual fact, during hypnosis, you are completely aware of what is going on around you and what you are doing. You will not do anything you would not normally do.

Hypnotherapy, either done on your self or done to you by another person, involves bypassing the conscious mind and speaking directly to your subconscious mind. This may seem to be a trance like state, but you are still fully aware of your surroundings. Hypnotherapy has a wide variety of uses in counseling and therapy.

Ever hear the expression, “Your mind can play tricks on you”? Well, you can use hypnosis to play tricks on your mind. Many times, throughout our lives, we hear or see things that we don’t always realize with our conscious mind, but our subconscious is busy recording it and worrying about it. This is why we have weird dreams about the things we fear. With self hypnosis, you can speak directly to your subconscious mind, and this will allow you some control over the ideas that are planted there and some ability to change those ideas. The basis of this is that the subconscious mind is more receptive to suggestions than the conscious mind.

Self-hypnotism involves inducing yourself into a hypnotic state and reciting ideas to yourself that you hope will help you to achieve your goals more easily. It allows you to override those of your conscious mind’s programming and habits which make it difficult for you to accomplish your goals.

With self-hypnotism, you present your subconscious mind with ideas and words meant to counter preconceived notions of things in your world. You change the way your mind looks at a task or a goal in order to give yourself a better chance of success.

This idea is quite common in sports, where athletes are encouraged to visualize themselves successfully completing a difficult move, and in dieting, where would be dieters are encouraged to visualize themselves as healthier, happier individuals. Hypnotism is the power of positive thinking extended further into your brain.

Our subconscious mind records everything which happens to us, and does no critical thinking about who is saying things. You may have negative attitudes about tasks or yourself just because of words you have heard in association, because the subconscious mind might record a negative thought without attaching a disclaimer to it, so even joking around can eventually have an effect on how you think about something. Hypnosis can be used in therapy or as self hypnosis to remove these negative thoughts and attitudes, or simply to create positive thoughts and attitudes.

How Self Hypnosis Is Done

Hypnosis may still seem like a mysterious form of mind control to many people; however it can be done, by you, to yourself. There are many books and websites available that will describe how to self hypnotize. It can seem difficult to do, but it is most important to remain relaxed and willing to be hypnotized.

You first need to induce a hypnotic state, which can be fairly easy. This is called the induction. It can be as formal or as informal as you like. You will usually need a comfortable and quiet place, remembering that during hypnosis, you will be able to hear and see everything that is going on, so in front of the TV which your family is watching may not be the most conducive place, and then to start with a change in posture, which will act as a physical cue to your body that you are ready to do this. You will need to breathe calmly and slowly, and focusing on your breathing and on something outside your body – a sound or a visual cue.

You need to “shut off” your thoughts. Soothing background music, or an induction tape that tells you what to do as you are going through the steps to self hypnotize can help. You can make your own induction tape or purchase one from a professional hypnotist.

Once you have relaxed into a hypnotic state, you can make suggestions which will allow you to plant ideas directly into your subconscious mind. This is called a prescription, or a script. This tells your subconscious mind exactly what you want it to think, using the power of positive thinking in order to help you achieve your goals. At the end of your hypnotic session, you will wake yourself up, which is easily done just by telling yourself to wake up, or by having your tape include the instruction to wake up. If you are hypnotizing yourself to help you fall asleep, obviously you will not want to wake up but rather drift into the sleep state from the hypnotic state.

You may not be able to hypnotize yourself very well the first time you try. Some people take longer than others to be able to self hypnotize, but most can hypnotize themselves fairly well within 3 weeks. Daily practice is important, both to develop the ability to hypnotize yourself, and to keep working towards your goal or objective - the reason why you are hypnotizing yourself. Each daily session will take up to half an hour, although with practice, sessions can become shorter.

What Is An Induction In Self Hypnosis?

An induction is the introduction of your mind to the hypnotic state. It can be a very formal, with a lot of ceremony and steps, done by a hypnotist on a subject, or it can be very simple, and done by the subject on themselves (self-hypnosis).

Whichever the case is, the eventual goal is to bring the subject to a hypnotic state. Once you've taught yourself how to do this, self-hypnosis can be a fun, easy, and useful way to improve your life. The induction helps your mind train itself to transition quickly to the hypnotized state.

First, you need a quiet, relaxing spot. During hypnosis, you can still hear outside sounds, so choosing a place and time that are quiet and comfortable is essential to successfully induce a hypnotic state. You may want to prepare a therapeutic thought which will be your main thought.

Remind yourself of your chosen goal. Repeat your goal to yourself several times, so it cannot be forgotten.

Beginning with your eyes closed, tell yourself to breathe deeply (unless you have purchased a tape, which will give you the instructions to breathe deeply). Breathe deeply. Focus on your breathing.

Choose a calming, therapeutic thought. Fill your mind with it and let it crowd out any other thoughts. These are your "magic words", a positive thought about your goal. Your major words are your prescription. This is using the power of positive thinking and the power of words in the most effective way.

You may also want to give yourself an instruction about how you will achieve your goal after you come out of hypnosis. (I will _____).

Wake up. Do this in a calm way, such as telling yourself you will wake up in 3 minutes, or that you will count down from 10.

Hypnotizing yourself can take practice, but it can also be a powerful tool to harness the power of positive thinking.

Unless you fall asleep, you will remember everything that happened. You may not feel like you were hypnotized, and the effects of being hypnotized may take time. If you have a lot of difficulty, you may wish to go to a professional hypnotherapist.

If you go to a professional hypnotherapist, beware of anyone who wishes to focus on past lives or past hurts. Focus on your positive goals and positive mindset.

Choosing a Prescription for Self Hypnosis

The hypnotic prescription is the "magic" words that form the script used during a hypnotic session. This script is used during the induction in order to focus your subconscious mind on your goals, and to remind your subconscious mind of the purpose of your goals. You need to choose a prevailing thought (constant, main thought) that you will use when leaving a hypnotic state, as well as while in the hypnotic state.

This thought can be fairly long ("I can do anything I set my mind to") or it may only be one word (Perhaps "Focus" or "Sleep"). Your subconscious mind will respond to these words either during or after your hypnotic session, and slowly, your belief system will change, and you will be able to reach your goals.

This demonstrates the power of words to change your life, and shows how each word can be very powerful. If you are constantly telling yourself you can't do something, you are setting yourself to fail. By the same token, if you are constantly telling someone else something is too hard, you are setting them up for failure. Be careful with your words. By using hypnosis to change the way your subconscious mind thinks of a task or chore, you are setting yourself up to succeed.

Your prescription may sound rather "New Age" to you, but it's important to note that hypnotism has been around for a lot longer than "New Age" has. Choose a prescription that is right for you, and do not worry if it sounds a bit silly at first, you will grow accustomed to it. It is more important that your prescription work than that you worry about how it sounds.

To choose what you are going to say, here are some tips:

- Frame what you are going to say in a positive way. Rather than: if I don't get better at my job, I will get fired, try: I will get better at my job and improve my career. Positive words reinforce your idea. Negative words will reinforce the idea that you cannot succeed.
- Add something that implies you have already completed all or part of your goal. If your goal is to be more confident, try: Each day I grow more confident in myself. I am confident in myself because I am a good person/worker/partner.
- Don't worry if you don't actually believe what you are saying. If your goal is to lose weight, and you don't believe that you can or have lost weight, remember that the purpose of hypnosis is to help you believe it's possible.
- Be as specific as possible (every day, I look better and better. I will continue eating more fruits every day, so I can continue looking better and better).

You can raise your self esteem and improve your life no matter what the conditions in your life are. Hypnosis helps you to use the power of positive thinking to train your mind to think you can accomplish whatever you want.

How Your Brain Works In Self Hypnosis

The brain is a very complicated organ, divided into sections. People are aware from science classes in high school that the brain is divided into the medulla oblongata, the cerebellum, and the cerebrum. The medulla oblongata is the part of the brain that controls automatic functions, like making our heart beat. The cerebellum is the part of our brain that controls our movement and coordination, like catching a ball, as well as our nervous system.

The cerebrum is the part of the brain that does all higher level thinking, and our thinking mind (cerebrum) is divided into our conscious mind and our subconscious mind. Our conscious mind is the part of our mind that is aware and thinking about whatever is going on in front of us. Our subconscious mind is a storehouse of neural pathways, full of memories and thoughts that are recorded and catalogued in a haphazard way.

Our subconscious mind records everything that happens to us, leading to impressions about activities and attitudes about tasks that we cannot always explain the reason for. Our conscious mind is what we use each day to make decisions, yet our subconscious mind sits behind it,

advising it on all decisions, and allowing many past habits and patterns to affect those decisions. We can see some of what our subconscious mind is thinking in our dreams, which is when our brain is organizing our memories and thoughts. While all thoughts and memories are recorded, some get lost in the shuffle of making new neural pathways. Our subconscious mind can have an effect on whether we succeed or fail at a task, simply by affecting our attitude towards that task.

We can use hypnosis to exert some control over what our subconscious mind is thinking, and to remove some negative thought patterns and habits. Because our subconscious mind has remembered parts of some memories without giving full information as to why you think a certain way, many of our responses to situations are emotional rather than logical. Hypnosis can reorganize some of the way your brain thinks about your chosen goal.

Meditation, which many might think is the same thing as hypnosis, is actually very different from hypnosis. This is shown by studies done which measured what the brain was doing during hypnosis and during meditation, as brain scans such as EKGs were done on subjects.

The meditative state is similar to the hypnotic state, however meditation is a popular form of relaxation and introspection, whereas in hypnosis, a specific goal is to be achieved through entering the hypnotic state and the power of suggestion.

Anyone Can Do Self Hypnosis

Anyone who is awake and who can reason can do self-hypnosis. Some people will find self hypnosis or the ability to be hypnotized by others easier, but with some practice, anyone can hypnotize themselves or be hypnotized. Self hypnosis is not necessarily easy, because even though anyone can do it, it does take some practice. So some effort is required. Once you learn to do it on yourself, you may be able to help others be hypnotized, but it is not a good idea to use hypnosis as entertainment, rather it is meant to be a form of therapy.

Many people do not believe in hypnosis, but even if you do not believe in hypnosis it can still work on you – you can still be hypnotized. However, while you are trying to hypnotize yourself, you will be aware of what you are doing and what you are trying to do, so you must be willing to be hypnotized, and be actually trying.

Not believing in hypnotism can actually make it much more difficult to self hypnotize – if you don't believe that something is possible, it makes it that much more difficult to succeed. This is also self fulfilling – if you don't believe that it is possible, you might not be able to do it the first time you try, and so you will now have "proof" that it is not possible. In a situation like this, it is best to try to find someone you know who has experienced being hypnotized and ask them for a description of it. After you've talked to a few people about it, and received similar descriptions of how it worked for them, you may be more ready to try again.

Some Background on Hypnosis

Hypnotherapy is widely regarded as a “New Age” trend, but hypnosis is not a new phenomenon. The earliest descriptions of activities similar to hypnosis date back to ancient Egyptian rites, over 6,000 years ago. Physicians in Europe were using hypnosis in the 17th and 18th centuries. And the word hypnosis itself was coined in 1843 by James Braid. There have been many studies done on hypnosis, as well as various religions weighing in on hypnosis. For example, the ancient Egyptians believed in its importance as part of their religion, while many present day Mormons frown on the idea, believing it opens the mind for the devil to enter.

In the end, it is each person’s individual decision to determine whether hypnosis can help them.

There are 3 basic categories of hypnosis:

- Stage hypnosis, which many people are familiar with as it can be a fun form of entertainment
- Hypnotherapy, which is actually two categories –
 - Hypnosis done by another person
 - Self hypnosis.

These are popular methods of therapy, and are often used as part of programs to quit smoking or lose weight. It’s similar to the idea of making tapes to listen to while you sleep in order to make your mind think a certain way, except in hypnosis, you are usually awake and accessing your subconscious mind for a very specific purpose.

Self Hypnosis as a Method of Achieving Goals

As with any goal setting, make sure your goals are SMART. This means your goal is:

- Specific - you have an exact goal rather than a general one
- Measurable – you will know when you’ve succeeded and how far you are along your path during your journey
- Attainable – your goals are actually possible for you to accomplish
- Reasonable – you give yourself the time you will need to achieve your goal
- Timely – you give yourself a timeline to follow, although you can be fairly flexible about this

If you want to lose weight, rather than say: I want to lose weight, it is better to choose something more specific and measurable: I will lose 2 pounds a week.

Also make sure goals are attainable – hypnotism cannot help you win the lottery, to build a house if you don’t know how to build a house or to build a house in one day. It can help you to gain more confidence at work or to overcome your fear of heights. A timeline is good to follow for many goals, such as quitting smoking or improving job performance, although for other goals, it can be difficult to quantify objectives. It’s hard to say how much you will improve your confidence by, or when you will be done improving your self confidence. Improving your confidence and self esteem is a more long term goal, which makes it more difficult to define.

You can however, decide that each day you will become more confident, or that you will begin to say no to things you cannot do, and congratulate yourself each day for becoming more confident and for anytime which you said no.

Choose the goal which is most important to you and use self hypnosis to help you achieve that goal. Self hypnosis can help you get past any obstacles that may be blocking your path, whether it be lack of confidence (I can't do this), patterns of behavior (I always do this while I am doing this), or other destructive behaviors.

Your goal may be one of a variety of things, such as:

- to improve memory and/or concentration
- to lower blood pressure or improve health in other ways
- to quit smoking or other destructive behaviors
- to increase self esteem or do better at work
- to improve your job performance or other skill
- to help you get to sleep, and help you get better sleep

Hypnotherapy can also be used to help expectant mothers relax during labor and have an easier birth, and to help reduce anxiety about childbirth. This can be learned with special coaches who specialize in hypnosis during pregnancy.

Your goals will also be achieved more easily if you repeat them in a waking (non hypnotic) state, to reinforce the idea in both your subconscious and conscious mind. Also, remember that during any process, there will be setbacks. When you have set backs, just take the time to refocus. Maybe take another look at your goal, or rewrite your hypnotic prescription, and then keep going.

Self Hypnosis as a Method To Help You Sleep

Many people in our stress filled environment have trouble falling asleep.

An area where self hypnosis can help is with your sleeping habits. While self hypnosis should not be used to reduce sleeping times, as not just your mind but also your physical body needs to rest, it can be used to reduce the amount of time spent lying in bed waiting to fall asleep. Practice the following form of minor self hypnosis to help you sleep. While the first few nights, this can take up to an hour to actually work, as your mind becomes accustomed to this "shut-off " cue, you will fall asleep faster and in a more relaxed way:

Make sure everything is ready for you to fall asleep before you begin, as it can become a bad habit to stop in the middle of self hypnosis to go check that the door is locked, or the alarm is set. If you tend to do this, make a list of pre-bed things to do, and tick each item off.

Begin while lying on your back in your bed. Make sure you are comfortable, with your arms lying by your sides. If you are worrying about something you need to do tomorrow, take a moment and write it down. Tell yourself you will deal with it tomorrow (or whenever you will be dealing with it) and push it from your mind. Go back to your position.

Contract and relax each set of muscles in your body, starting with your toes and ending as high up as you can control. (For some people, this ends with shoulder contractions). Remember that you are trying to relax, so don't worry if your body is not cooperating.

Focus on your breathing. With your eyes closed, tell yourself that you are becoming very relaxed and calm. If you need to have an image in your head, choose something calm and soothing, such as the sky. (This can also be done with your eyes open. Choose which is more natural for you).

Instead of counting sheep, simply count slowly down from a number. Try starting with 30, although some people may need more and others less.

Count slowly and with each number, tell yourself that you are becoming sleepier.

When you reach zero, tell yourself that you are so sleepy; you might not even be able to open your eyes. Relax and let yourself drift away.

This may take time to work. If it does not work the first time, try slowing down the countdown, or choosing a different image.

Many people try to use self-hypnosis as a method in order to function on less sleep, forgetting that our body's needs are separate from what our mind thinks – you can hypnotize yourself into thinking you do not need to eat, but you will still need to eat, and the same goes for sleep. Self hypnosis cannot actually replace sleep, it only makes it easier to fall asleep and for some people can improve the quality of their sleep.

Self Hypnosis Compared to Hypnosis by Another Person

Hypnosis for personal development, and not for a stage show, may be better if you can do it by yourself. (It would be very difficult to hypnotize or mesmerize yourself or another person for a stage show).

Self hypnosis can be more difficult and take longer than being hypnotized by a professional hypnotist. In some cases, however, it may be easier – you may be more willing to be relaxed and trusting of yourself than of another person.

Another advantage is that for a long term effect, it may be necessary to be hypnotized more than once or twice. It can be more convenient to learn to hypnotize yourself than to have to go to another person.

It may take longer to learn to hypnotize yourself than to be hypnotized by a professional hypnotist, but learning to hypnotize yourself also removes any risk of spending a lot of money on an inferior hypnotist who perhaps might not get what you need done.

For therapeutic purposes, hypnosis with a professional may be superior, but it may not be superior enough to outweigh the risks and loss of control. Hypnosis can also be more beneficial if it is done regularly, and regular sessions with a professional can be costly.

There is also the risk of choosing an incompetent hypnotherapist, or perhaps one who already has their own theories of what you need to do. Some hypnotherapists can be very focused on repressed memories, and while these can surface naturally, and it may be helpful to have professional assistance should they arise, if a therapist is looking for repressed memories, they will find them. Even if these memories didn't actually happen, because the subconscious mind is so receptive, it can be convinced something did happen.

For many people, a concern is that hypnosis will bring up repressed memories that they may not be ready to deal with, and for these people, it may be better to go with a professional hypnotherapist, so as to have professional help with any problems which may arise. You may also decide that it is less likely for you to bring back a repressed memory if you focus on your own goals during self-hypnosis, and thus this will not be a concern for you.

The natural advantage to self-hypnosis is that you can do this by yourself every day, which will more easily reinforce your goal and may make success more likely. This advantage may outweigh the advantage to going to a professional therapist or hypnotherapist, who may be better at hypnotizing you, and get faster results, but would not be able to provide the desired daily long term benefits.

Common Concerns about Self Hypnosis

Many people have concerns about hypnotism. A common image when thinking about hypnotism is a stage show, perhaps one where a volunteer from the audience is hypnotized into thinking they are a chicken, or caused to quack like a duck when a bell is rung. There is a simple solution to these fears. Just don't volunteer at a stage hypnotism show. Many people become more suggestible at a stage hypnotism show, merely because of the number of people watching and the nervousness they might feel. (Or sometimes they go along with it just to be funny).

Most other concerns can be addressed if you simply think of hypnotism as similar to, although different from, meditation. Hypnotism is simply a state of extreme concentration, and you are conscious during the entire session, so you will not get stuck in, or unable to return from, a hypnotic state. Rather, you will finish your prescription and slowly come back to the mental state you were in before, only perhaps more calm. During the hypnotic session, you will still hear everything that is going on around you, and you will remember everything that happened (unless you fall asleep).

Unless you are being hypnotized by someone else, you will retain complete control over yourself during hypnosis. You will not do anything that you wouldn't do under normal circumstances; you are simply making suggestions to yourself in order to become a better person. Even if you are being hypnotized by another person, you will still be aware and still be yourself while it is happening, and you will remember what happened afterwards.

A common question people have is: will I wake up? Just as you can wake yourself up from sleep, you will wake up easily from a hypnotic state. You or your tape will simply instruct yourself to wake up, and you will calmly come out of the hypnotic state according to your instructions.

Another concern many have is repressed memories. Many fear that they have repressed bad memories of their childhood, and are scared that hypnosis will cause all of these repressed memories to surface. This can be one of the dangers of less professional hypnotherapists, as they are often eager to find repressed memories as an excuse for anything that is wrong with you. However, while hypnosis will occasionally bring a repressed or forgotten memory to the surface, it is not that common an occurrence, especially as during self hypnosis, you will be focusing on telling your subconscious what to be thinking about, so there will be little opportunity for a repressed memory to surface.

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