

## Is hypnosis an effective form of therapy? <sup>[1]</sup>

Dear Alice,

What is your opinion about hypnosis? Is it dangerous? Does it really work? I have a few issues about my personality that I would like to work on and the more I read about hypnosis, the more I think this is what I need. It almost sounds like magic to me. Would this kind of therapy help me with my many problems such as: self-confidence, communication problems, control of my emotions, sexual intercourse pain, etc.? As you see, I have quite a few things to work on and I really hope that hypnosis will help me. However, I wanted to get your opinion about it before I go ahead and do it. Thank you very much for your wise advice.

Desperately wanting to improve my life.

### **Answer**

Dear Desperately wanting to improve my life,

Many people have concerns about their personalities from time to time, want to know how to better understand themselves, and make improvements — so your question is a good one! There's evidence to suggest that hypnosis may be a helpful tool for stress, anxiety, and pain relief, but it's most beneficial when used with other forms of therapy and medical treatment. However, the research doesn't establish a clear connection between hypnosis and treatment for self-confidence, communication problems, control of emotions, or pain with sexual intercourse. Furthermore, while hypnotherapists are certified by various organizations, there isn't a recognized standardization for the practice of hypnotherapy. If you're interested in pursuing it, you may want to talk with a health care provider who has special training in hypnotherapy, rather than a hypnotist with no medical licensing. Fortunately, there are other therapeutic options you can explore as well.

Hypnotherapy got its name from the Greek word *hypnos*, or sleep — and while people aren't actually asleep during hypnotherapy, they *are* intended to reach an altered state of consciousness called relaxed focus. While in this state, they become highly suggestible and imaginative, disregarding other stimuli in the environment and focus solely on a certain point or topic. Generally speaking, for hypnosis to work, people must want to be hypnotized, believe they can be, and feel relaxed enough to engage or 'give in' to the process. However, experts indicate

that it won't cause them to lose control of their mind or body or do something they don't want to do.

Research has shown that hypnotherapy has minor effects on the body, such as changes in skin temperature, heart rate, blood pressure, and brain wave patterns. However, these effects are not markedly different from those induced by other forms of relaxation (such as massages or yoga) and aren't necessarily therapeutic. Although more research is needed to understand the effects of hypnosis for specific medical and psychological conditions, it's suspected to incite neuroendocrine pathways in the brain, which may affect emotion regulation and pain management (the [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#) [2] has even more information).

It's also been noted that hypnotherapy may be more beneficial to use in conjunction with other forms of therapy, not in place of scientifically established and proven treatments or therapies. For patients with various psychiatric illnesses, [dissociative disorders](#) [3], or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), hypnosis may exacerbate these conditions. And, it may also cause headache, drowsiness, anxiety, dizziness, distress, and the creation of false memories. That said, in cases where people have mental health conditions with no known treatments or are unable to find a conclusive diagnosis, it may be useful to try hypnotherapy as it can be relatively low-risk.

Desperately wanting to improve my life, it might be helpful to start by working with a health care provider and a [mental health professional](#) [4]. These providers can help you identify treatment options regarding the issues you want to address and the goals you wish to set for yourself. If you'd like to try out hypnosis, it's wise to contact your insurance provider to locate providers in your network who support [complementary and alternative approaches](#) [5]. If your current health care provider doesn't have training in hypnotherapy, they'll likely be able to refer you to someone who does. For some additional research on these issues and self-help techniques, you can explore the [Emotional Health](#) [6] and [Sexual & Reproductive Health](#) [7] categories in the *Go Ask Alice!* archives.

Lastly, when it comes to self-improvement, it's crucial to exude the same compassion and patience towards yourself that you would afford a close friend. Change can be hard but is often more successful when done gradually. You've taken a giant step forward by identifying the areas you want to improve. Best of luck on your journey towards self-growth!

Alice!

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