

Chapter 1

Examining Hypnotherapy

In This Chapter

- ▶ Understanding the terms
 - ▶ Realising the evolution of hypnosis
 - ▶ Looking to hypnosis for help
 - ▶ Distinguishing the therapeutic aspects
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Hypnosis is a powerful technique. It can help you change negative beliefs and achieve your goals, treat serious emotional problems, and alleviate a range of medical conditions.

You may hear about a work colleague who was cured of smoking in a single session, or a friend of a friend whose lifelong phobia was permanently removed by a hypnotherapist. A hypnotherapist can also show you how to practise self-hypnosis in order to achieve a seemingly infinite variety of personal goals.

This chapter explains what hypnosis and hypnotherapy are about. It gives you a clear understanding of what is involved, the difference between hypnosis and hypnotherapy, and some of the amazing benefits possible.

Getting to Grips with the Basics of Hypnotherapy

First things first. We want to reassure you right up front that hypnosis is safe.



Being hypnotised is not dissimilar to being sleepy or in a daydream. And, as we explain in the 'Sliding into trance' subsection, you've been in a trance probably every day of your life; hypnotherapy is simply a method of putting your trance state to work solving your problems.

When you're in a hypnotic trance, you are completely aware of the words being spoken to you by the hypnotherapist. And, should a fire alarm go off – or any other physically threatening situation arise – you will immediately take yourself out of trance to respond.

Hypnosis carries an element of risk as do all therapies and activities. But, as long as your hypnotherapist is properly qualified, and operates within a professional code of conduct and ethics (which we discuss in Chapter 12), you needn't worry.

In the following subsections, we sort out the jargon and the basic terms used in hypnotherapy.

Discovering the differences between hypnosis and hypnotherapy

The first useful thing to distinguish is the difference between hypnosis and hypnotherapy. We really want you to understand that there is a big difference between the act of hypnotising someone (hypnosis) and the amazing changes that can happen with the help of a qualified hypnotherapist (hypnotherapy). We hope that after you read this section you will never confuse a stage hypnotist (the person you see getting laughs on TV) with a hypnotherapist (the person who helps you stop smoking, lose weight, or recover from a life-long phobia).

- ✓ **Hypnosis** is a state of mind connected to deep relaxation, narrowed focus, and increased suggestibility. Hypnosis is an intermediate state between sleep and wakefulness.

Hypnosis can be likened to the state you are in when you act intuitively instead of intellectually. During hypnosis, you basically ask your inner drill sergeant to take a break while your clever, artistic self comes forward. And believe us, everybody has both aspects within them!

- ✓ **Hypnotherapy** is hypnosis used for therapeutic purposes. Hypnotherapy applies the technique of hypnosis to encourage your unconscious mind to find solutions to problems.



Hypnosis is a state of consciousness. Hypnotherapy is a therapy. Hypnosis itself is not therapy. The therapy part of a hypnotherapy session occurs after hypnosis has been used to induce your trance. Then the hypnotherapist makes suggestions that help your unconscious mind achieve your goals or remove your problems. Just as there are many avenues to hypnosis, including self-hypnosis and self-induced trances (see the next section), there are many different hypnotherapy techniques and applications. (Chapter 2 talks about the range of hypnotherapy tools.)

Stage hypnosis is not hypnotherapy

Stage hypnosis is a form of entertainment. It is not a way to receive help for your problems or to achieve your aspirations. We do not recommend that you become personally involved in stage hypnosis as there is no personal care for your individual needs. It's a stage act where the main aim is to get laughs – at your expense if you get on stage!

Many, many people get involved in stage hypnosis with no bad after-effects. However, some

former stage participants have suffered emotional problems afterwards. This is an area of great debate as to whether these people were already predisposed to emotional problems, or if stage hypnosis had a negative influence.

An interesting book that involves a critical look at stage hypnosis is *Investigating Stage Hypnosis* by Tracie O'Keefe and Katrina Fox (Extraordinary People Press).

Sliding into trance

Trance is a state of mind that involves a selective focus of attention. You are in a natural trance state several times each day, usually when you're relaxing.

Examples of times you may slip into a trance include:

- ✓ Being fully involved in reading a book
- ✓ Going window shopping at your favourite stores
- ✓ Becoming anxious or fearful about an upcoming event
- ✓ Playing with an imaginary friend as a child
- ✓ Zoning out while exercising
- ✓ Fantasising about an old love interest

Trance states occur naturally and regularly. Hypnosis utilises these states to access your unconscious mind (see the next section) in order to help you more easily achieve your goal or solve your problem.

The following are the main trance states, and some of the traits a hypnotised person may experience while in each state, listed from light to deep levels:

- ✓ **Light trance:** Eyes closed, relaxed face muscles, deepened breathing.
- ✓ **Medium trance:** Head and body slump, reduced awareness of surroundings, slower responses, deepening of light trance state.
- ✓ **Deep trance:** Deepening of medium trance state, deeper abdominal breathing.

- ✓ **Somnambulism:** A very rare trance state in which a hypnotised person may experience sensations as if awake. Commonly known as sleepwalking, this is a very rare condition. This state is counterproductive in hypnosis because the person is in too deep a state to retain the hypnotherapy suggestions in either their conscious or unconscious memory!



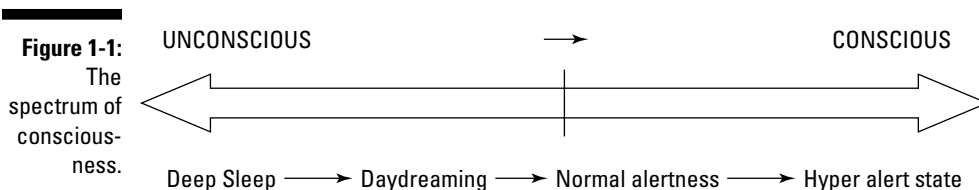
At increasingly deeper levels of trance, you become more open to your unconscious mind and more receptive to hypnotic suggestions from the hypnotherapist. We discuss the importance of these therapeutic hypnotic suggestions throughout this book.

Examining states of mind

Conscious and unconscious are terms that describe aspects of your mind. Though impossible to prove as a reality, these concepts are widely accepted in the Western world. The *conscious* mind thinks quantitatively using words, numbers, and logical and sequential thinking. The *unconscious* mind, on the other hand, uses images, memories, feelings, intuition, dreams, and abstract, non-sequential thinking.

If you think of your mind as a spectrum, at one end of the spectrum is the super-alert state you're in when you're frightened or excited. At the other end of the spectrum is deep sleep. Figure 1-1 shows the spectrum of consciousness, from the unconscious to conscious states. In the middle of this consciousness spectrum is everyday alert states of mind, in which you're relatively focused on what you are doing. The left of this point, towards the unconscious end, represents an everyday trance state, such as daydreaming.

Interestingly, the word 'hypnosis' comes from Hypnos, the Greek god of sleep. So perhaps the *extreme* left end of the spectrum would be coma, but we're trying to be uplifting here!



In this admittedly superficial model of human consciousness, the unconscious mind resides somewhere between daydreaming and deep sleep. Conversely, consciousness resides at all points to the right of the midway point.

A brief history of hypnosis

Hypnosis isn't a modern concept, it has been around for a long time. Egyptian hieroglyphics exist depicting the locals experiencing hypnosis as part of religious rituals. Many early practices of hypnosis were linked with a belief in religion, magic, and the occult. These rituals often involved a cure of some illness during what was mistakenly presumed to be sleep. (It was actually a hypnotic trance.) Egyptian priests would hypnotise people to treat illnesses using hypnotic suggestions.

Similarly, in classical Greece, worshippers went to temples to invoke Hypnos, the god of sleep, who brought them healing and prophetic dreams. It is well documented that people would come to sleep in the Temple of Aesculapius, the Greek god of medicine, while priests would speak to them while sleeping, offering suggestions for healing.

Actually, it's impossible to say where hypnosis came from. From the time that mankind developed speech there has probably been some sort of practice where one person expressed

words that induced a trance state, in order to alter everyday awareness. Many early cultures have evidence of eliciting hypnotic phenomena for both spiritual and healing purposes.

A modern day equivalent of hypnotic phenomena, such as trance, is seen in religious 'tent revivals', where hands are laid on and people are felt to be 'healed'. However, this is not the type of hypnosis that this book focuses on!

The history of hypnosis is a fascinating subject. If you read about hypnosis over the centuries, different cultures view it differently. It often had a reputation of dubiousness, and/or power, associated with it. The main reason for this reputation is because, until the nineteenth century, the concept of the unconscious was unknown and hypnosis may have seemed like a religious, or possibly supernatural, practice. If you really want to go into the details of the history of hypnosis, one of the finest books on the subject is *Hidden Depths: The Story of Hypnosis* by Robin Waterfield (Pan Books).

No doubt this very simple model will have many scientists in dismay but, if nothing else, it should help you to understand one important thing: that consciousness and unconsciousness are two sides of the same coin. There isn't an either/or aspect to it, but only shades of grey.

Table 1-1 gives you another way to understand the differences between the conscious and unconscious mind.

Table 1-1 Traits of the Conscious and Unconscious Mind	
<i>Conscious Mind</i>	<i>Unconscious Mind</i>
Logical	Intuitive
Sequential thoughts	Random thoughts

(continued)

Table 1-1 (continued)

<i>Conscious Mind</i>	<i>Unconscious Mind</i>
Easily accesses short-term and some long-term memories	Can access most lived memories and experiences since childhood
Uses words/numbers	Uses images/feelings
Analytical	Creative

So, although you may think that your conscious mind is in control most of the time, your hypnotherapist accesses your unconscious mind in order to help you to change your negative thinking, or solve your problems.

Why access the unconscious mind? Because, although your conscious mind is excellent at logical, sequential, and analytical thinking, it can also be quite fixed. Your conscious mind may also develop unhelpful defences in its attempt to protect itself. The unconscious mind is a more flexible friend, and can easily change old habits and defences maintained by your conscious mind.

Getting Past that Old-Style Hypnosis

You've probably seen examples of old-fashioned hypnosis in the movies. The scene usually portrays the hypnotist as a slightly overbearing authority figure and the patient as an unquestioning, sheepish character, totally powerless to resist the hypnotist's commands. The way the hypnotist induces trance is totally graceless and very dominating. He (and it was always a 'he') commands: 'YOUR EYES ARE GETTING HEAVY, YOU WILL GO TO SLEEEEEP . . .' Very boorish indeed!

Although a rather extreme caricature, this scenario is not a million miles away from how old-style hypnotherapists used to operate. But as the times changed, so has the way that hypnotherapists work. Today, medics and professionals are no longer revered for their unattainable knowledge. Most people have access to medical information if they want it. Back then, professionals put themselves above the common, non medical person. And historically, many – though not all – hypnotherapists were physicians or psychiatrists. Hypnotherapy training today is no longer exclusively the domain of the medical profession and a wider, rich range of professions are involved in its practice.

Some common attributes of what we call old-style hypnosis involved:

- ✓ An authoritarian approach and presentation to the patient.
- ✓ The hypnotherapist commanding the patient into trance.
- ✓ A very monotone, artless, repetitive approach to trance induction.
- ✓ The absence of a therapeutic relationship between therapist and patient.
- ✓ A doctor-knows-best approach to treatment. No negotiation.

In essence, the old-style approach was: ‘Do as you’re told.’ Today, people don’t accept this type of behaviour from a professional from whom they’re seeking help. People expect to have a dialogue, ask questions, and be treated with respect. So clearly, the old style – essentially an authoritarian style – had to be modified.

Understanding the way hypnotists *used* to work is helpful in understanding how modern methods of hypnotherapy thinking and practice developed.



Milton Erickson, a US psychiatrist who started practising hypnotherapy in the early 1900s, helped modernise the field. He developed a variety of new techniques, as well as a more relaxed approach called the *permissive hypnosis style*, traits of which include:

- ✓ Greater respect, gentleness, and support for the patient.
- ✓ Use of any aspect of a patient’s beliefs and language to induce trance.
- ✓ Empowering the patient’s unconscious mind to find its own solution.
- ✓ The use of metaphor. Erickson developed the ability to improvise storytelling relevant to a patient’s life, interests, and/or problem to help the patient’s unconscious mind search for its own solution.

It is difficult to convey Erickson’s widespread influence. No other single hypnotherapist to date has influenced current hypnotherapy practice as much as Erickson. Not only did Erickson write prolifically about his techniques, but also other hypnotherapists have written prolifically about Erickson, and have even analysed his style of working with patients to create new forms of therapies. (See Chapter 15 for information on cousins of hypnotherapy, especially Neuro-linguistic Programming.)

Finding Help with Hypnosis

Hypnotherapy can help you cope with a wide range of issues, including:

- ✓ Increasing confidence
- ✓ Breaking bad habits such as smoking, nail-biting, bed-wetting, and so on
- ✓ Removing phobias
- ✓ Managing pain
- ✓ Enhancing performance in artistic, academic, and athletic fields
- ✓ Controlling weight and improving eating habits
- ✓ Correcting eating disorders
- ✓ Curtailing excessive alcohol use

This is just a brief overview of some of the most common hypnotherapy treatment areas. If you're curious about a problem not listed here, speaking to a hypnotherapist can certainly clarify whether the issue you're concerned about is one that hypnotherapy can address. The Appendix offers help in finding an organisation or hypnotherapist to help you.

Understanding the Therapy Part of Hypnotherapy

We write enthusiastically about the potentials for change that hypnotherapy can provide. If you have never experienced hypnotherapy, it's probably a bit difficult to understand how these changes happen when you're in trance, with your eyes closed and in a daydream-like state. Fair enough!

In order to explain how therapy occurs while you're in trance, remember this: during hypnosis your body is relaxed, but your thoughts become very attentive. You are able to focus at an enhanced level when you are in a hypnotherapy session. And what you are focusing on is the therapist's suggestions. This is where the therapy part begins. If your issue is to avoid sweet, fattening foods, the therapist gives your unconscious mind specific suggestions on how to do this very easily. If you are coming to hypnosis to stop smoking, the hypnotherapist gives you suggestions to remove your associations with smoking, so that you no longer have any desire to smoke and no longer consider yourself to be a smoker! Jump to Chapter 13 for a detailed account of what happens during a hypnotherapy session

Hypnosis plus counselling

Hypnotherapists often employ techniques and skills from a wide variety of counselling methods. These skills begin with listening well, in order to accurately understand what you want from the hypnotherapy. Being empathetic, whilst forming a working relationship with the patient, is a skill hypnotherapists have developed since the old days of authoritarian style hypnosis.

There is a huge range of counselling methods, and hypnotherapists may have different theoretical starting points. So do not expect a hypnotherapist to use a specific counselling method. A qualified hypnotherapist should be at least a good listener, and someone who helps you feel confident about the hypnotherapy work the two of you are involved in.

Hypnosis plus psychotherapy

Psychotherapy does not usually focus on a single problem and is about exploring feelings. Psychotherapy does not start with a concept of how many sessions will be required, and places no limits on the number of sessions needed. Hypnotherapists tend to work in a limited number of sessions – usually less than half a dozen – unless additional problem issues arise.

However, the techniques of psychotherapy are sometimes used by hypnotherapists who particularly need to go into past personal history issues. Saying that, most hypnotherapists are very here-and-now orientated and unlike psychotherapists, don't generally spend time talking about your childhood. However, this depends on the problem being brought to the hypnotherapist.

