

# Chapter 1

## What Is Self-Hypnosis?

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### *In This Chapter*

- ▶ Understanding what self-hypnosis is all about
  - ▶ Discovering how self-hypnosis works
  - ▶ Feeling safe about self-hypnosis
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**W**hether you realise you are or not, you're doing self-hypnosis continually, every hour of the day. In this book we guide this natural tendency to help you get what you want using the raw skills you already possess. In this book we will help you to understand how hypnosis works and how you can hypnotise yourself using different techniques – old and new.

We also help you to develop powerful self-hypnosis skills across a range of topics, including:

- ✓ How to clarify your goals.
- ✓ How to train your mind for a range of different self-hypnosis approaches.
- ✓ How to improve your outlook.
- ✓ How to achieve more with *less effort*.
- ✓ How to apply self-hypnosis to specific problems.

You may be *pleasantly surprised*, as hypnotherapists frequently like to say, at your new-found abilities after applying the ideas and practical suggestions in this book.

## *Understanding Self-Hypnosis*

As you read this book, you're in a slight trance state. You're hearing the words on the page in your mind; they're stimulating you to think in a certain way. In a literal sense, you're simply looking at dried ink on paper. Yet the letters are forming words that give you a certain meaning that they don't to someone who can't read or comprehend what you're able to understand easily.

## Unconscious self-hypnosis

We show you a new and exciting approach to self-hypnosis that we've developed based on our clinical practice – *unconscious self-hypnosis*.

Unconscious self-hypnosis works without you having to think about what's happening, unlike traditional self-hypnosis methods that can involve very self-conscious approaches. This is a significant departure, as you don't have to close your eyes and sit in a quiet room or to do artificial countdowns or deepeners.

Unconscious self-hypnosis is fast and you can do it in many real-world situations, including:

- ✔ With your eyes open
- ✔ In the workplace,
- ✔ In noisy, public places
- ✔ While you're talking or listening to others

Traditional methods of self-hypnosis often require some form of isolation from your daily routine, which isn't always possible for people living a busy life. Some methods require you to take an hour of undisturbed time. For most people, finding a regular hour of undisturbed time's probably difficult – but that's not a requirement of unconscious self-hypnosis.

Unconscious self-hypnosis works rapidly and in very light trance states that can be indistinguishable from daydream states. We're all natural born experts at daydreaming – we bet you've wondered a few times what you may do if you won the lottery.

Once you've mastered unconscious self-hypnosis, you have a skill for life that works like a thermostat, continually adjusting itself when you need to access the resources of your inner mind.

Self-hypnosis is like that: simply by focusing, you can go into a relaxed state of mind, sometimes called 'trance'. In this trance state you can allow your mind to create new meanings and discoveries in your life that can help you *spontaneously create new behaviours* and *form helpful beliefs*.

Creating a trance state's the first part of doing self-hypnosis. The second part's giving yourself a hypnotic suggestion for change. This is called the *hypnotic suggestion*. The italicised words in the previous paragraph – *spontaneously create new behaviours* and *form helpful beliefs* – are direct examples of two hypnotic suggestions. Already your unconscious mind understands that effective self-hypnosis changes your unhelpful behaviours and beliefs. When these changes occur, you're doing effective self-hypnosis.

In this book we take you through a range of topics that help you develop skills of self-hypnosis.

## *The ins and outs of self-hypnosis*

The first time one of us (Mike) was hypnotised, it was by someone informally many years ago. I was speaking to a well-known hypnotherapist and enquired

what being hypnotised felt like. This person was keen to stay within his professional boundaries, but I was persistent. The hypnotherapist simply asked me two or three questions and I was in an altered state. The questions he asked me that sent me into a light trance state were:

- ✔ Do you know what a *trance state* is?
- ✔ What do you think it *feels* like to *go into a trance*?
- ✔ How may you *use hypnosis* if you were to *go into a trance*?

This happened during the middle of a conversation in a noisy room full of people who were unaware what was happening. Without realising the power of these three sentences, I noticed a shift in my state of mind – I was only slightly more relaxed, but in a dramatically different state.

The hypnotherapist then explained how the unconscious can perceive questions as hypnotic commands. Look again at the italicised words in his three questions and this may begin to make sense to you.



Some people don't like the phrase 'trance state'. Specifically, disagreement occurs over the existence of the concept of a hypnotic trance state. Some people argue that trance, as first proposed by Scottish surgeon and hypnotherapy pioneer James Braid (1795–1860), doesn't exist. Instead, they propose a *non-state theory of hypnosis* and believe that a hypnotised person is simply role playing because this is what others expect and that no altered state of consciousness exists. We disagree with this view, but include the debate for your information.

## *Finding out how to induce hypnosis*

No limits exist to the methods that enable you to go into trance. But one thing's clear: you can forget about any impressions of trance inductions that you may have seen on television or in the movies. Media representations of hypnotherapy tend towards the sensational and are invariably a misrepresentation.

Trance is an everyday state of mind. Trance can be as simple as daydreaming or as complicated as you want.

When you go to sleep each night, do you think about your technique for falling asleep? Perhaps if you're an insomniac, but otherwise, probably not.

You can induce trance from just about any state. The most common approach is to relax to go into trance, as you do to sleep naturally at night. But athletes go into trance by the opposite method: tensing their bodies and creating a very tough, super-focused mindset. Few rules exist except that the method you choose should be appropriate for your hypnosis goals.

As you find out more about unconscious self-hypnosis, you become increasingly nonchalant about technique in your self-hypnosis practice – and you begin simply to enjoy the process.

## *Delving into your unconscious mind*

Think of your unconscious mind as the unknown part of you that school never showed you how to use. This is the part of your mind that isn't concerned with logic, words or the 'real world'.

*I think that cognitive scientists would support the view that our visual system does not directly represent what is out there in the world and that our brain constructs a lot of the imagery that we believe we are seeing.*

Galen Rowell

We're convinced that by practising self-hypnosis you begin to construct a new imagery and perspective about the potential you can achieve. This will help you to free your self from your previous limitations.

## *Scoping out the uses of self-hypnosis*

Hypnosis works on any areas connected to your mind and central nervous system – that's an immense territory of potential applications. Areas that hypnosis can potentially help with include the following:

- ✓ Anxiety
- ✓ Breaking habits
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Infertility
- ✓ Memory enhancement
- ✓ Pain management
- ✓ Performance issues
- ✓ Phobias
- ✓ Stopping smoking

If you need to work on deep emotional problems, however, generally speaking we recommend you begin with a counsellor or a hypnotherapist. Then through self-hypnosis you can sustain and reinforce the insights you gain.

## *Seeing How Self-Hypnosis Works*

Hypnotherapy helps you reprogram your behaviour and give messages to the body to support these changes. Trance induction relaxes your body and pushes away the totalitarian grip of your conscious mind. You usually induce trance by slowing your breathing and relaxing your muscles with each out breath, so that your body becomes increasingly relaxed. This also slows down your pulse rate.

Relaxation has a knock-on effect on your central nervous system and endocrine system, which is why self-hypnosis can help with things like skin disorders, pain reduction and even fertility – some women who've been unable to conceive have fallen pregnant after using hypnotherapy.

As your body slows your pulse and metabolism, eventually your conscious mind slows down. In fact, your conscious mind – a creature of habit – so habitually associates these slowed body functions with the sleep process that it relaxes its grip and allows your unconscious to take over. This is akin to the factory day-shift worker clocking out to allow the night-shift worker to clock in.

### *Using suggestibility*

As your conscious mind takes a background place – or even goes completely on vacation – your unconscious is primed and ready to receive hypnotic suggestions.

The suggestions you use in self-hypnosis can come in two flavours:

- ✓ Suggestions to further deepen initial trance states (optional)
- ✓ Suggestions for therapeutic change

If you feel ready to deepen the trance, you have at your disposal an array of options that can help you to go deeper. As you progress through this book, not only will you learn different ways to use self-hypnosis, but you will also become confident enough to improvise and even record your own self-hypnosis CDs.

If you're ready to do the therapy part of your self-hypnotherapy, then you simply think your pre-planned, concisely worded hypnotic suggestion to yourself. (For more on how to construct self-hypnosis suggestions see Chapter 6 'Working with Words: Becoming Your Own Recording Star'.)

These two categories of suggestions that you can use in self-hypnosis form the backbone of your future hypnosis sessions. Within this structure exists a great deal of room for creativity.

## *Working with dissociation*

Dissociation means to separate or to stop associating with. One of the first things you let go of in hypnosis are your own critical thoughts that are restricting you and keeping you stuck with a particular problem. A hypnotherapist does this by helping you to see a different perspective that empowers you. In this way the problem doesn't control you, you control the problem. This is termed *reframing*. For example, reframing 'pain' as 'discomfort' is a common hypnotherapy technique for managing chronic migraines and is also used with hypnosis in childbirth situations.

Dissociation, most importantly, focuses on intentionally separating the *conscious mind* (which deals with concrete, logical thinking) from the *unconscious mind* (which deals with abstractions, feelings, intuition).

Your conscious mind keeps you firmly grounded, but is also the seat of your critical and limiting thinking. Your conscious mind's your 'rule keeper': it thinks 'You have this problem, so you behave in the following manner.'

Your unconscious mind's your 'artist/creator'. You can overcome limitations by asking your unconscious mind to imagine, for example, 'What am I like if I don't have the problem? How do I feel to be free?'



French psychologist Pierre Janet (1859–1947) first suggested the concept of dissociation, proposing that at times (as with hypnosis) a separation occurs between your conscious and unconscious minds. During this dissociation, the conscious mind lessens its grip over your behaviour, thinking and body functions and allows your unconscious to respond more directly to the hypnotherapist.

Dissociation occurs as you become able to relax or focus more inwardly. As you become more relaxed during the trance induction, your unconscious mind begins to respond to the hypnotist (or your own self-hypnosis suggestions), while your conscious mind retains the awareness of reality.

This can be very useful when applying hypnosis to areas such as:

- ✓ Eating problems
- ✓ Memory enhancement

- ✓ Overcoming physical reactions to fear and anxiety
- ✓ Pain management
- ✓ Self-anaesthesia (dental hypnosis)
- ✓ Stopping smoking (ignoring the urge for a cigarette)

## *Building on post-hypnotic suggestions*

After you reach a comfortable level of trance (and that doesn't have to be deep), you (or the hypnotherapist if you want to have hypnosis done *to* you for your first time) can begin to give post-hypnotic suggestions.

Post-hypnotic suggestions are the component of the hypnosis session where the message for change or therapy occurs. These are the key messages that enable a shift in your behaviour or thinking to move you closer towards your goals.



The 'post' part of the term 'post-hypnotic suggestion' indicates that a suggestion's given *after* you're in trance.

Post-hypnotic are the words, suggestions or 'scripts' that are created to deal directly with and resolve your problem. Simple and concise single sentences work best when constructing post-hypnotic suggestions and in Chapter 6 we help you to do this.

Effective post-hypnotic suggestions involve clever use of language and logic mechanisms to help lure the mind into making changes. One example combines a truism – a statement too obvious to disagree with – with a post-hypnotic suggestion for change:

'As the sun sets every evening, so you're going deeper and becoming relaxed . . .'

Skilful hypnotherapists work with language in various ways in order to plant suggestions within your unconscious that facilitate your getting what you want.

## *Reassuring Yourself About Safety*

One area of concern about hypnosis focuses on personal safety during the hypnosis process. This is understandable, as historically hypnosis has been surrounded by mystique and misrepresentation. Even someone like yourself, who has a genuine interest in this area, may also have concerns before

becoming involved with hypnotherapy or self-hypnosis. In fact, if you search on the internet for 'Frequently Asked Questions + Hypnosis', you repeatedly see similar queries regarding the potential risks of hypnosis.

Here are some typical safety questions:

- ✔ Do I reveal my own secrets against my will?
- ✔ Can I open myself to possession?
- ✔ Can the hypnotherapist make me cluck like a chicken?

You're always in control when hypnotised and no one can make you do anything against your will. *You* cannot make yourself do anything against your will, for that matter.

Some people with particular religious or spiritual beliefs can be concerned about potential spiritual harm from hypnosis. However, this is a misconception. This is because self-hypnosis is simply a form of directing your mind away from feeling trapped by a problem and moving it towards the ability to generate new potential ways of achieving goals. See self-hypnosis as a way of harnessing your imagination for productive means. Additionally, when you are hypnotised, you are safe and able to be aware of everything around you. This means that you can safely come out of trance at anytime you wish. When these points are understood, we can free ourselves from any misinformed fears about the process of hypnosis.

The last question in the preceding list ('Can the hypnotherapist make me cluck like a chicken?') is one that first-time visitors to a hypnosis session actually want to ask, but rarely say directly. This fear's based on influences from stage hypnosis, where participants are often hypnotised for laughs and lightweight entertainment. Clinical hypnotherapy focuses only on helping you to achieve your goals by empowering you. No humiliating or demeaning behaviours are involved.

When approaching self-hypnosis for the first time, you may have similar safety apprehensions to those above, intensified by being alone.

The key concept to remember is that self-hypnosis is safe and that you're always in control. Self-hypnosis is like a daydream state where you're guiding the daydream.



## *Staying in control*

One of the nicest things about hypnosis is that you're always in control. Many people expect that when they're hypnotised certain things happen that simply don't occur.

So be reassured by understanding that when you're hypnotised you're still able to:

- ✓ Hear or ignore what the hypnotherapist is saying to you
- ✓ Think your own thoughts
- ✓ Come out of trance when you choose (although if a hypnotherapist is conducting the hypnosis, chances are that you want to stay in trance for as long as possible)

The irony is that while people who are new to hypnosis sometimes focus on whether they lose control, those who are experienced with self-hypnosis understand how they're *increasing* their abilities to be more in control.

## *Deciding when to stop hypnosis*

Generally speaking, you know when you've had enough self-hypnosis because you get bored or come out of trance. This experience varies for different people. For some people, brief periods of two to four minutes are enough. Others may choose to spend significantly longer periods of time in trance.

Initially, you could time yourself to ensure that you can maintain a trance state for around two to three minutes. But we would strongly recommend practising self-hypnosis by feel alone. Eventually, as you become more experienced and comfortable with self-hypnosis, there will be no need to worry about timing or other common fears like not coming out of trance. It is very similar to daydreaming. Even the most pleasant daydreams cannot be sustained for more than a few minutes. So you can be assured that you will never be 'stuck' in trance.

## *Knowing you always wake up*

Another common safety question is ‘Am I able to come out of trance?’

A useful way to reassure yourself about not getting stuck in trance is simply to think of the approach as like having a brief, pleasant daydream – you just can’t avoid coming out of the daydream eventually.

People *always* come out of trance. Trance isn’t a coma. In fact, people who are hypnotised by a hypnotherapist are often amazed at the end of the session that they were able to hear what was being said, or even not listen and yet still respond.

Keep in mind, however, that when you do self-hypnosis, you probably don’t go into as deep a relaxed state as when someone else hypnotises you. In fact, depth of trance is irrelevant and is certainly *not the goal* of hypnosis.

The goal of hypnosis is to focus your unconscious to be able to help you to make changes. And this can happen even in very light trance states. This information should be very reassuring to you as you begin to practise self-hypnosis. You don’t have to put yourself to sleep to make effective changes.