

# HOW AND WHY HYPNOSIS WORKS

**Thomas Yarnell, Ph.D.**

**Licensed Clinical Psychologist  
Hypnosis Specialist**

Modern hypnosis has been used for hundreds of years to build self-confidence, change habits, lose weight with weight loss programs, stop smoking, improve memory, end behavior problems in children and eliminate anxiety, fear and phobias.

The question is, WHAT IS HYPNOSIS? Hypnosis is a state of mind characterized by relaxed brain waves and a state of hyper-suggestibility. Hypnosis and hypnotic suggestions have played a major role in healing for thousands of years. According to the World Health Organization, 90% of the general population can be hypnotized. Hypnosis is a perfectly normal state that just about everyone has experienced. What we call "highway hypnosis" is a natural hypnotic state. You drive somewhere and don't remember driving or even remember seeing the usual landmarks. You are on automatic pilot. The natural hypnotic state also exists when you become so involved in a book, TV show or some other activity that everything else is blocked out. Someone can talk to you and you don't even see or hear them. Whenever you concentrate that strongly, you automatically slip into the natural hypnotic state.

The hypnotic state, by itself, is only useful for the relaxation it produces. The real importance of hypnosis to the healing and emotional change process is that while you are in the hypnotic state, your mind is open and receptive to suggestions. Positive and healing suggestions are able to sink deeply into your mind much more quickly and strongly than when you are in a normal, awake state of mind. I say positive suggestions because all research has demonstrated that while in the hypnotic state, you cannot be made to do anything against your moral values.

All of our habitual and behavior controlling thoughts reside in what is called our subconscious mind. It's called that because it is deeper than our conscious mind. It's below our level of consciousness. We are unaware of the thoughts and feelings that reside there. Did you ever forget you had a dental appointment or some other appointment that you really didn't want to keep? Your subconscious mind is where that thought or memory that you had to go to the dentist at 2 PM went when you forgot you had the appointment. Once it was too late to go, your conscious mind relaxed and the memory came back.

Imagine that there is a trap door between your conscious mind and your subconscious mind. Normally, the trap door is closed until your brain waves slow down to a relaxed, alpha brain wave level. This happens when you are asleep. The door opens for short periods of time and ideas, images and thoughts come out of your subconscious mind. We call what comes out in your sleep, "dreams". When you are in a state of hypnosis, the door also opens so helpful suggestions can be directed into your subconscious mind or forgotten memories can be retrieved.

The hypnotic induction that hypnotists use is simply a way to focus your attention and concentration so you will go into that natural, normal hypnotic state. Once in the state of hypnosis, the trap door opens and suggestions to help you can be given. The list of ways hypnosis has been used to help children, adolescents and adults is practically endless but does include: weight loss, stopping smoking, building self-confidence and self-esteem, improving academic performance at every age level, improving test taking ability from children through high school, college, medical and law school as well as the National Teacher Certification Exam, pain management, eliminating anxiety, fear and phobias, stress management, insomnia and other sleep problems and helping to heal physical problems.

2. To really work well, suggestions must be reinforced by repetition. Most of the habits, feelings and emotions we want to change are deeply implanted in our subconscious mind and

will not just "go away" with one set of suggestions. Most of the time, the hypnotic suggestions need to be repeated on a regular basis until you notice a change. This is one reason that most specialists in hypnosis give clients cassette tapes of their sessions so they can listen to them every day. It's also the reason why hypnosis tapes you buy can work so well. You get to listen to them every day or often enough that the suggestions become permanently a part of you. There is no way to predict how long it will take to see change. It will depend partly on your motivation and commitment.

The Three Keys to the successful use of hypnosis for self improvement and personal growth are self motivation, repetition and believable suggestions.

1. The motivation to change must come from within you. If you are trying to change because someone else wants you to "lose weight" or "stop smoking", the chances are greatly reduced that the hypnosis will work. For example, I've worked with many people for weight loss or to quit smoking who came to me because their physician or spouse wanted them to change. These people do not respond as well to the hypnosis as those who really want to change. Those who came because they wanted to quit smoking or lose weight responded quickly and easily. Before you start to use hypnosis for your self improvement, you should get it clear in your own mind why you want to change. This clear intention to change will help the hypnotic suggestions to take hold and manifest themselves in your everyday life.
2. The third key to the successful use of hypnosis for personal change is believable suggestions. If you are to accept a suggestion, your mind must first accept it as a real possibility. Telling a chocoholic that chocolate will be disgusting to them and will make them sick is too big a stretch for the imagination. If a suggestion like this even took hold, it would only last a short time because it would be so unbelievable to a real chocolate lover. In cases like this, one of the successful weight loss suggestions I use is that the next time the individual eats chocolate, it will not taste quite as good as the time before. This is far more acceptable and believable to most people. Then, with enough repetition over a period of time, chocolate loses much of its positive taste and control over that person.

One final note is that HYPNOSIS IS NOT DANGEROUS. There are almost no risks when used by trained professionals. You cannot be made to do anything that is against your moral values. An amateur or stage hypnotist might give you suggestions that might embarrass you, might not work or that might make you feel uncomfortable or self-conscious at the time. To avoid this, stick with professionally trained hypnosis specialists. The one risk I know about involves falling asleep. If you are tired or if you become too relaxed, you may move from the state of hypnosis to the normal sleep state. This is fine if you were going to go to sleep right after the trance but if you have other plans after listening to a hypnosis tape, you may want to set an alarm clock just in case you fall asleep. I've even had students fall asleep because they became too relaxed. In relation to this, never listen to a hypnosis tape while driving. It is very dangerous for you and everyone else on the road. Don't even listen to it if you are a passenger as the relaxation suggestions could make the driver fall asleep.

Over the years, self improvement and personal growth using hypnosis has helped millions of people change their lives permanently because it is a safe and powerful tool for changing your thoughts, feelings and habits.