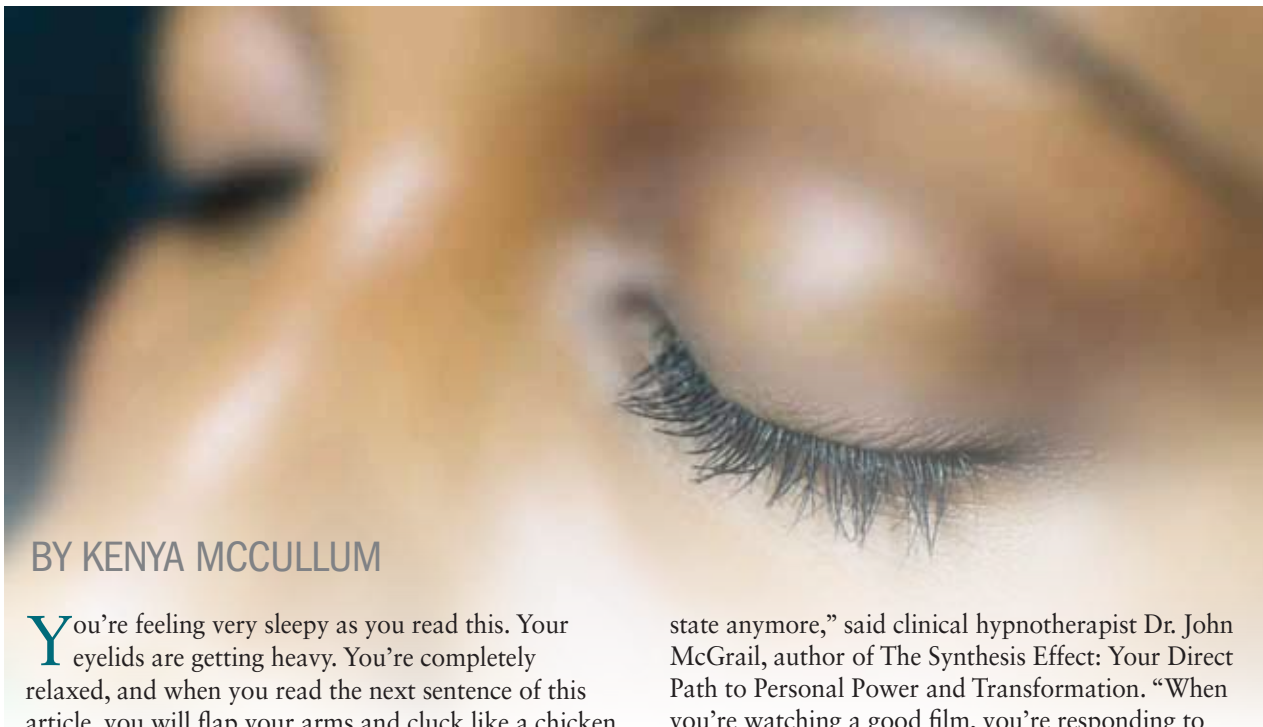


Hypnosis for Better Health



BY KENYA MCCULLUM

You're feeling very sleepy as you read this. Your eyelids are getting heavy. You're completely relaxed, and when you read the next sentence of this article, you will flap your arms and cluck like a chicken three times.

Thanks to many examples in popular culture, when people think of hypnotism, they generally envision a scenario much like this. But hypnosis is not just a parlor trick performed by wannabe Harry Houdinis. When used in a clinical setting, hypnosis can be a mechanism for improving patients' health and well-being by working on problems at a subconscious level.

Although the idea of using hypnosis for better health might sound a little bit like metaphysical voodoo, the fact is we actually experience levels of hypnotic states all the time. Whenever we get engrossed in an activity — driving, listening to music, watching a movie — we enter a natural state of consciousness that is akin to what the stage hypnotist does to his unwitting volunteers during a show.

“When the subconscious mind takes over, which is what happens in hypnosis, it cannot tell the difference between illusion and reality — so a good movie feels real for those two hours and when the movie is over, the lights come up and we come back to what is called conscious awareness. You're not under the trance

state anymore,” said clinical hypnotherapist Dr. John McGrail, author of *The Synthesis Effect: Your Direct Path to Personal Power and Transformation*. “When you're watching a good film, you're responding to suggestion. The same thing happens when you read a really good book or when you just daydream.”

When done in a more deliberate manner, this hypnotic state can be instrumental in overcoming a myriad of health challenges, and patients commonly report that clinical hypnosis has helped them with issues like weight loss, smoking cessation and overcoming fears and anxiety.

In addition, clinical hypnotists may also help patients with serious physical ailments, like chronic pain and psychological problems, including depression. In these cases, practitioners will work in conjunction with their patients' physicians to ensure that the treatments do not ultimately cause more harm than good. For example, frequent headaches are often a sign of serious health problems and although a clinical hypnotist can eradicate the headaches, it doesn't help the patient if the underlying illness is still present. The symptoms have merely been masked.

WORKING WITH A CLINICAL HYPNOTIST

Many people who consider hypnotherapy fear that the process will put them at risk of being programmed

to do things that they don't want do. But, according to Jason Linett of Virginia Hypnosis, the opposite is actually true.

“Some people have the expectation that hypnosis involves some kind of loss of control, when really hypnosis is more about helping people take control of those parts of their lives that often feel like they're out of control,” he said. “So, we're dealing with habits, we're dealing with behaviors, and we're dealing with emotions, beliefs and feelings. Rather than being that loss of control, it's that process of helping people empower themselves to think better, feel better and become much more effective at what they're doing.”

Clinical hypnotists begin their sessions much like a doctor by doing a patient intake to understand what the problem is. During this time, the hypnotist will ask about the patient's issue, how it originated, how it manifests itself and, most importantly, what success will look like when the hypnotherapy sessions are complete.

Based on this information, the hypnotist will tailor sessions toward patients' specific needs and goals. But no matter what the problem is, the objective remains the same — to slow the brain waves so that patients' unconscious mind will be open to making the changes they want to make. This can be done in a number of ways, such as by having patients count backwards, visualize something that relaxes them or stare at an object.

Once patients have entered this relaxed state, the hypnotist will begin the work of encouraging their subconscious mind to change. This is effective because the process quiets down the conscious mind — which often clings to the familiar and stands in the way of change — and allows the subconscious mind to take over during the session.

“The conscious mind is usually in the front seat and the subconscious is in the back seat. This is how most of us operate, but the subconscious is more of the driver — It's the backseat driver,” said hypnotherapist Beverly Flaxington, author of *Understanding Other People: The Five Secrets to Human Behavior*. “During hypnosis, if you've done it well, the subconscious is really sitting now in the front seat listening and the conscious mind is taking a little bit of a backseat.”

And when your subconscious mind gets behind the wheel, it begins to reprogram your conscious mind, encouraging it to make the changes that you are trying to make — but only if you really want to make them.

“Provided a person wants to change, hypnosis is usually 100 percent successful; otherwise it can have between a 75 to 85 percent success rate,” said Colin Christopher, author of *Success Through Manipulation: Subconscious Reactions That Will Make or Break You*. ❖



Choosing a Clinical Hypnotist

Check credentials. There is no state licensing procedure for clinical hypnotists at this time, but there are a number of professional associations that issue certifications, such as the National Guild of Hypnotists, the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis and the International Medical and Dental Hypnotherapy Association. You can find clinical hypnotists through these associations, or check the credentials of the ones that you're already interested in working with.

Get references. Just like with any other service, it's important to get references. Try talking to patients who have tackled the same issues that you want to change to get a sense of whether a hypnotherapist is the right fit.

Look for community involvement. One way to tell if a clinical hypnotist is reputable is by looking for evidence of involvement in the professional community, as well as your local community. Does the hypnotist have a blog about their work? Does the hypnotist write journal articles about clinical hypnosis or participate in industry conferences? Has the hypnotist been interviewed on local television or radio? These can be indicators of experience and a deep involvement in the field.