

Bark like a Dog or Quack like a Duck?: The Facts and Misconceptions about Hypnosis

By Dr. Elizabeth King, LCSW, CH.t

I decided to write this article because it dawned on me that there are still a lot of misconceptions out there about what hypnosis is or isn't. I don't think a few days go by at my health care center that I don't hear from one of our new clients the infamous question "if you hypnotize me, are you going to make me bark like a dog or quack like a duck?". There is always a nervous chuckle following the question, as if to say, "I really don't believe in hypnosis". Well, don't feel embarrassed if you are one of those people that has asked that same question (even if it was just to yourself). I must admit I was guilty of asking the same question before I found the need to learn about hypnosis (you can read about my journey with chronic pain and how hypnotherapy got me back on my feet, in my book to be published next year). Not to make excuses for all of us that have doubts about hypnosis, but our perception of what hypnosis is was formulated by watching stage performers at a comedy club, whose job was to make us all laugh about the silly commands that they called out to "willing to make themselves look foolish" participants. All in the name of fun. Of course, most of us leave the comedy club, saying "there is no way that was real". If you are lucky enough to have had the opportunity to be exposed to the research on the many uses of hypnotherapy, you are ahead of the game and probably chuckling right now at our naivety. Unfortunately, for many of us, we learn how effective hypnosis can be because we have tried everything else and hypnosis is our last resort for getting relief of whatever ailment we are suffering from.

Sparked by recent headline news of celebrities overdosing on medication, there has been a lot more interest in understanding how hypnosis works and how it can be used. Mainstream medical journals and shows like "Good Morning America and Prime Time Live", to name a few, have recently done several pieces on hypnosis as a viable option for relieving the symptoms of psychological and physiological conditions. As more people become educated about hypnosis, I foresee that "traditional" medical practitioners will be forced to incorporating it into their clinical practices.

What are the misconceptions and facts about hypnosis?

I know there are a whole lot more misconceptions about what hypnosis is or is not than the ones I am listing here. But if I can clarify some of the more common ones then maybe some of you doubters out there will be willing to research whether hypnosis is right for you. Hope this helps.

Misconception: People have to be gullible for hypnosis to work.

Fact: Research has shown that the most people can benefit from hypnosis. Choosing to be responsive to suggestions means that you understand the concept of how hypnosis

works and are willing to allow your mind and body to do what is natural. In my practice, I have not noticed IQ to be at all reflective in someone's ability to be hypnotized.

Misconception: The person being hypnotized will be under the control of the hypnotist and can be made to do or say anything the hypnotist wants.

Fact: No matter how deeply hypnotized you are, you will remain in total control. You cannot be made to do anything you do not want to do. Rest assured that no one can make you bark like a dog or quack like a duck unless you agree to do it.

Misconception: Hypnosis is something that is done to someone, rather than something that can be done for oneself.

Fact: Hypnosis is a skill you can learn. It is a tool you can use to help yourself feel better

Misconception: You can be trapped in hypnosis and may never come out of it.

Fact: You may end hypnosis whenever you want. Just like you can not stay asleep forever, you cannot be under hypnosis forever.

Misconception: During hypnosis, you are unconscious or asleep.

Fact: During hypnosis, you are not asleep or unconscious. Although many of my clients do fall asleep because they feel very relaxed, they are still aware of everything and are active participants in the process.

Misconception: You have to be lying down in a quiet place to be able to go into a hypnotic trance.

Fact: You can go into a hypnotic trance sitting up or lying down. It is all about practicing to be tuned in with your mind and body. An experienced hypnotherapist can teach you how to do self-hypnosis anywhere.

What can Hypnosis be used for?

The Mayo Clinic reports that hypnotherapy can be used to:

- Reduce or eliminate anxiety, phobias, and depression
- Change negative behaviors such as smoking, overeating, and addictions
- Lower blood pressure
- Control pain from injury or chronic illness, surgery, and child birth
- Reduce intensity or frequency of migraines
- Help heal skin diseases, including warts and psoriasis

How can I choose a great hypnotherapist?

The answer is simple. Research the person's credentials, ask around for references, and most importantly, schedule an appointment to speak (in person or by phone) to ask the hypnotherapist lots of questions. Having a good rapport with the hypnotherapist, feeling that she/he is knowledgeable, and understanding the process are key elements to being able to relax enough to be guided into hypnosis.

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