

The quiet power of clinical hypnotherapy: a journey into the mind's innate healing potential

President of the Australian Hypnotherapists' Association Danielle Aitken explores the science, effectiveness and therapeutic applications of clinical hypnotherapy, highlighting its growing credibility, neurological basis and standards for professional practice.



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Before we can explore the rich terrain of hypnotherapy, we must begin with the most foundational of questions: What is hypnosis?

Surprisingly, even among seasoned professionals, this question invites a wide spectrum of answers. Despite decades of research, hypnosis resists a single, universally accepted definition, and therein lies part of its fascination.

Milton Erickson, often regarded as the father of modern hypnotherapy, described hypnosis as 'a state of consciousness marked by heightened receptivity and responsiveness to suggestion'. Importantly, he made it very clear: hypnosis is not sleep, nor is it unconsciousness. It is a waking, conscious state – one that opens the door to possibility.

Still, misconceptions abound. One of the most common is that hypnosis involves mind control. This couldn't be further from the truth. Hypnosis is not about losing control; in fact, it's quite the opposite, it's about reclaiming it.

Let's clear the air. Clinical hypnotherapy isn't swinging watches, whispered chants or clucking like a chicken on command. Those are the theatrics of stage hypnosis, which, while entertaining, bear little resemblance to clinical practice. Hypnotherapy is just that – therapy. Therapy that uses hypnosis as a tool to facilitate deep, often life-changing transformation.

Think of hypnosis as a journey vehicle, moving someone from where they are to where they want to be. In this state, you are aware, focused, and always in control. No one, not even the most skilled hypnotherapist, can make you do anything against your will or values.

So, what does it feel like?

Many describe hypnosis as a state of deep relaxation or inward focus, similar to being so immersed in a movie that the outside world fades

away. Others relate it to that dreamy moment before sleep. Regardless of how it feels, hypnosis creates a receptive state where suggestions bypass the critical conscious mind and reach the subconscious; the part that shapes our habits, emotions and core beliefs. This direct access often enables hypnotherapy to succeed where conventional therapies may not.

The power of hypnotherapy lies in its ability to access this subconscious realm. Here, true change can take root. Whether it's overcoming fear, shifting self-sabotaging patterns, or unlocking confidence, hypnosis creates the conditions for transformation.

In summary, my own working definition is this:

'Hypnosis is a natural state of altered consciousness, providing a heightened awareness combined with an increased focus of attention, often – but not always – facilitated by voluntary relaxation. In this state, people generally experience increased suggestibility to agreeable, well-constructed language in the form of therapeutically applied suggestions.'

Let's be clear: hypnosis isn't magic. It's a powerful, collaborative process that invites you to look within. And when you do, you may just discover the answers you've been seeking have been with you all along.

Whether used to address physical symptoms, emotional wounds, or limiting beliefs, hypnotherapy can offer a space of possibility, where insight, healing and renewal can unfold.

Let's look at the evidence

Although clinical hypnotherapy was once relegated to the very fringes of modern medicine, it now commands a growing body of empirical support across diverse health domains. The American Psychological Association defines hypnosis as 'a state of consciousness involving focused attention and reduced peripheral awareness characterised by an enhanced

In the realm of mental health, cognitive hypnotherapy has produced results comparable to cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) for depression⁴. It is also gaining much traction in smoking cessation programs⁵.

Put simply, hypnosis doesn't just feel different, it is different. The brain becomes more flexible, open, and primed for positive change. In this altered state, the critical,

For clinical hypnotherapy to be fully embraced, consistent, ethical and research-based education training standards are a must. Although many existing training facilities already offer such courses, in an unregulated industry finding an appropriately qualified practitioner can sometimes feel like navigating without a compass. This is why it is essential to seek out a hypnotherapist registered with a self-regulatory body such as the Australian Hypnotherapists' Association (AHA) - one of the oldest and most trusted hypnotherapy associations in the world.

So, before you book that session, ask the question that matters most: 'Is your hypnotherapist an AHA hypnotherapist?' If the answer is yes, you can rest easy; you're in safe, well-trained hands.

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