

# HYPNOTHERAPY



Is it a heap of hype or something that really works? *WF* deputy editor Samera Kamaleddine volunteered to go under to see if it could cure a severe lifetime phobia

## WHAT IS IT?

Forget everything you've seen about hypnosis on TV/YouTube/cruise ships. According to Sydney-based clinical hypnotherapist Henriette Menday (henriettemenday.com), hypnotherapy is all about getting you in a state of deep concentration and focus, where you're physically and mentally relaxed. "It's similar to when you're absorbed in a book and everything outside of that falls away," she explains. "When you're that focused it's much easier for you to take in new concepts and perspectives. Hypnosis is an effective form of delivering a message to someone while they're in that state."

The biggest misunderstanding about hypnosis, says Menday, is that it's a form of mind control. "People often ask, 'Will I have to tell you things?' or 'Can I get stuck in hypnosis?' And no, you don't," she says. "These misconceptions come from stage hypnosis where you see people walking around quacking like ducks. They use hypnotic techniques like I would, however, with a very different intent." Menday's technique is called Ericksonian, and rather than following a script as with traditional hypnotherapy (the kind you might come across in audio/app form or a group class), it's more personalised.

"It's about you being in control. I make suggestions and you have the absorption and focus to consider them. It gives you skills to help you become a person that can handle problems," explains Menday.

## DID YOU KNOW?

In 1849 a British physician pioneered the use of hypnosis for anaesthesia and pain control in surgery (including amputations – ouch!), with hypnosurgery still taking place today. We'll take modern medicine, thanks!

Anyone is able to go under hypnosis, even if you don't have an open mind about it. "A predictor for a successful outcome is a) someone who actually wants to change, and b) someone who is willing to take some responsibility in the process."

## THE BENEFITS

The biggest pro of hypnotherapy – if done well – is results happen quickly. "Things like phobias or traumas can take a long time to treat in traditional psychotherapy as you dredge through the past and look at painful experiences," explains Menday. In hypnotherapy, on the other hand, it's rare to go into the past. The exception is when there's a painful incident that needs to be acknowledged, but it's not something you'll dwell on.

"Usually, hypnotherapy is not traumatic. It can be a very pleasant experience," says Menday. "The most common reaction, especially for those with anxiety, is, 'I didn't know you could feel like that'. A lot of people are amazed with the distortion of time. That drives home to them how powerful hypnotherapy is."

A good result can be achieved after only three or four sessions (which go for around half an hour each), but the best part? The effects can be long-lasting and evolving. "People feel so excited about going out there and living their lives that they don't perceive the need to come back, which is my goal," Menday adds.

## SAMERA SAYS...

"I asked Henriette to work some magic on an anxiety of mine: my paralysing fear of dogs that stems from a bad childhood experience. Over the years I've offended friends, boyfriends and random dog-walkers (whom I regularly cross the road to dodge, even when their dog is on a lead). It creeps up on me every time I visit a dog-friendly park or new person's house (what if they have a dog roaming around?!) and it's something I don't want to live with forever. I've spent much time researching and one thing that keeps popping up is

## HOW YOU CAN USE IT

Hypnotherapy is most commonly used for:

- Treating anxiety (eg OCD, social anxiety)
- Banishing fears and phobias (like dogs! Or a fear of public speaking)
- Pain control
- Kicking a bad habit/addiction, like smoking
- Alleviating depression
- Stress relief
- Self-esteem/confidence issues

hypnotherapy, so I've been itching to give it a go. Enter my very first session.

"I got comfy on an armchair while Henriette instructed me to close my eyes and empty my thoughts. When you're a wired over-thinker like me, this is *hard*. But her soothing voice soon had me in a trance-like state; imagine an out-of-body experience, except I knew exactly where I was and what was going on. And it was the most Relaxing. Thing. Ever. I came out of it (after what felt like 10 minutes but in reality was closer to half an hour) with a helpful, positive message ingrained in my mind – one that can be applied to lots of other things in my life, too. She gave me a recording of the session to listen to a few times before my next one. It's funny, there were things I don't remember hearing when I was under. But the point of listening over it, she tells me, is to reinforce the message.

"During the next week the craziest thing happened: I saw a big dog and had this sudden urge to go and touch it! I excitedly went back under for a second and third session and, honestly, wanted to keep getting hypnotised. But, Henriette had armed with me all the tools I needed to go forth and take over the world (or, er, conquer any fear or anxiety that comes along). And that message she so kindly planted? It's one I'll keep using."

PHOTOGRAPHY GETTY IMAGES; THINKSTOCK

Want to try hypnotherapy? Look for a therapist that's a member of the Australian Hypnotherapists Association by heading to [ahahypnotherapy.org.au](http://ahahypnotherapy.org.au)