



# MIND OVER MATTER

As far back as 1892 the British Medical Association commissioned a team of doctors to evaluate the effects of hypnotherapy and reported that they found it effective in relieving pain, procuring sleep and alleviating other ailments, such as anxiety disorder. More recently, there have been a number of trials that have shown it to be effective and the body of research continues to grow.

All that may be very interesting, but how does it help people with cancer?

The first thing to realise is that no hypnotherapist will suggest that they

expect to cure your cancer. However, what hypnotherapy can do is help improve a cancer patient's quality of life, and there is plenty of evidence to suggest that it does this very effectively in a number of ways.

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Belinda Hulstrom is a practicing hypnotherapist and president of the Australian Association of Clinical Hypnotherapy & Psychotherapy and has seen the power of hypnotherapy in her work.

"We tend to think of the mind and body as though they were separate things but I use a lot of bio-feedback in my work and am able to demonstrate to people that their thought processes can affect their physiology," she explained.

"While it's quite right to say that no responsible hypnotherapist will ever tell someone they can cure their cancer, hypnotherapy in this context is about



There's a lot of misconception about hypnotherapy, despite the fact that it's been accepted as a valid treatment for more than 100 years.

freeing the person from any limiting beliefs they have about their prognosis."

Studies of hypnotherapy have found that it works well with other treatments for cancer so it won't interfere with conventional therapies. While hypnotherapy is generally a safe treatment, it may involve risks for some people with mental illnesses such as schizophrenia or dementia.

### HELPING WITH SIDE EFFECTS

Nausea and vomiting are common side effects of chemotherapy. What

is perhaps less commonly known is that around a quarter of patients receiving chemotherapy will develop anticipatory nausea and vomiting (ANV) by the time they have received three treatments. This means that they begin to feel ill even before the chemo is administered. Unfortunately, antiemetic drugs do not seem to help ANV once it has developed but hypnotherapy has been found to be effective.

In a systematic review of hypnotherapy and relaxation therapies specifically for cancer patients published in 1999 it was concluded ...

### Benefits of hypnotherapy for cancer patients

Studies exist to support the effectiveness of hypnotherapy in the following areas:

- **Reduction in side-effects:** hypnotherapy has been shown to reduce the incidence of side-effects of cancer treatment such as nausea and vomiting.
- **Reduction in pain:** hypnotherapy can be useful in reducing pain from both cancer treatment and cancer itself.
- **Relief of stress and anxiety:** anxiety is common in cancer patients and hypnotherapy has been shown to help.





that there is strong evidence from randomised trials of the effectiveness of hypnosis and relaxation for cancer related anxiety, pain, nausea and vomiting.

A further review in 2011 found that in eight studies a significant reduction of nausea was achieved, a reduction in emesis (vomiting) was found in six and in five studies antiemetic use was reduced.

## TREATMENT FOR PAIN

There is also plenty of evidence to support the use of hypnotherapy in treating pain in patients with cancer. A number of studies have shown a significant reduction in pain among patients treated with hypnotherapy and a further number have shown a reduction in pain-related anxiety.

Belinda Hulstrom agreed that pain-relief is definitely achievable through hypnotherapy and cited a successful

example of its use in a surgical context.

"In 2005 the ABC broadcast an episode of *Catalyst* on the subject of hypnosis. In that they included the story of a South Australian woman who had almost died because of a reaction to general anaesthetic when undergoing surgery in the past. Unfortunately, she now needed major abdominal surgery but she was able to find a GP who was a qualified hypnotherapist and he was able to use his skills to get her through



## About Belinda

Belinda Hulstrom is an Oxford graduate with over 25 years of experience in diverse roles in adult and secondary education, marketing, human resources,

counselling and hypnotherapy. She is the current President of the Australian Association of Clinical Hypnotherapy & Psychotherapy and Secretary of the national peak body, The Hypnotherapy Council of Australia. She is also a member of The Australian Counselling Association.

The AACHP is an established professional association with stringent membership criteria and its members are recognised hypnotherapy providers with health insurance companies including Medibank Private, CBHS,

Australian Unity, Phoenix Health Fund, RT Health Fund, Westfund Ltd, Healthcare Insurance Ltd and Grand United.

Members of the public seeking the help of a professional clinical hypnotherapist can feel confident about approaching any AACHP practitioners, all of whom have successfully completed approved training courses, are bound by a strict code of ethics, undergo clinical supervision and are required to complete on-going professional development.



## How much will it cost?

the whole operation pain-free, without any other anaesthetic. If hypnotherapy can do that, it can definitely help people deal with cancer pain."

### FINDING A PRACTITIONER

If you decide that hypnotherapy could help you, finding a practitioner is the next step. Belinda suggested that prospective clients begin by looking for a hypnotherapist who belongs to a professional association.

"People who are members of an association have to demonstrate that they've had proper training and education, they have to do ongoing CPE (continuing professional education), they have to do what's called professional supervision or clinical supervision – in other words they're accountable to a supervisor and are constantly debriefing – and they have to abide by a fairly stringent code of ethics," explained Belinda.

"The second thing is, speak to the hypnotherapist before you see them. Get a feel for whether this person is going to be somebody you can work with. The most important thing in hypnotherapy is the ability to have a rapport. If you don't feel comfortable with the person, it's going to be very hard for you to let go of that more vigilant, critical faculty and it's going to be harder for you to allow yourself to go into hypnosis," said Belinda.

If you are contacting a therapist who is part of a larger practice you may find it's a receptionist who answers the phone to make the appointment, but Belinda suggests you still try to talk to the hypnotherapist before you see them.

A good place to start your search for a hypnotherapist is at the Australian Association of Clinical Hypnotherapy & Psychotherapy website, where they list accredited practitioners. Visit [www.aachp.com/findapractitioner](http://www.aachp.com/findapractitioner).

### WHAT TO EXPECT

Once you've found a therapist you'll want to know what to expect.

"There are as many variations on what to expect at a session as there are hypnotherapists," explained Belinda, "I usually suggest that clients send me an email before our first session telling me anything and everything that they think I need to be aware of. I can get anything from five lines to five pages in response, but it's all really helpful. In treating someone, I need to get to know them really quickly because I need to determine what kind of approach I'm going to take."

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"At an initial session there'll typically be a form to fill in and then your therapist will discuss with you what's on the form. With my clients, we might talk a little about them and how they're feeling, what kind of treatment they've already done and what they found helpful or unhelpful. Then I'll talk to them about what hypnosis is. Some people might be a little bit wary or

THE COST OF A HYPNOTHERAPIST will vary depending on where you are and there is no general rule of thumb. Belinda suggests that once you've found a hypnotherapist you think you want to see, do a bit of research and find a few others in your area so you can compare. "Ring and ask how much they charge so you can get a bit of a feel. It's quite variable, but you could expect to pay somewhere between \$100 to \$150 per hour, more for longer sessions," she said.

Also, do remember that many private health funds offer rebates for hypnotherapy, so be sure to find out if yours offers any refunds on this kind of treatment.

anxious but depending on how they feel I would hope we'd be able to get working with some actual therapy under hypnosis in the area where they want to create positive change."

The number of sessions required to achieve the best outcome will depend very much on the individual and there's no way to determine that before you start. Very rarely, Belinda has had clients who see results after just one session but it's usual to need more.

Belinda's final advice is that people do as much investigation as possible.

"You've got to take responsibility for finding out as much as you can to feel comfortable and informed and perhaps even a little excited about the possibilities," she explained.

"When you look at the research that's being done into the way the mind and body are communicating you've got to acknowledge that what we think and believe is pretty important," said Belinda. "Hypnosis is about creating an environment where the mind can see fighting cancer as a real possibility."

"I'm not saying we shouldn't be listening to the doctors; we should be working with them. But we should also be broadening the scope of what we do to include the possibility that we can make changes and improvements. That mindset is crucial." **HFC**