

How the Knowledge and Use of Hypnosis Supports Healthy Outcomes in Childbirth and Surgery

Introduction

Hypnosis.

Does the term conjure up an image of a powerful master and a helpless subject caught in a trance, performing any act from behaving like a poodle to the chicken dance? If that's what you think, then think again.

Hypnosis is an altered state of consciousness, which you and you alone control and it is a powerful tool for taking command of your health. With hypnosis, you can quit smoking, lose weight, shift negative patterns of behavior, and remarkably, experience partial to almost complete pain relief and deep relaxation during childbirth. Equally amazing, hypnosis can be used during surgery to provide non-drug based pain relief, so-called non-pharmacologic analgesia, and to help speed up recovery time. Does it sound impossible? Do you think this level of expertise takes years of practice?

In truth, you already have plenty of rehearsal time under your belt. Whenever you do anything by rote, whether it's your standard morning routine, stuffing hundreds of envelopes, or listening to music while driving home, you're in hypnosis. In fact, you are in and out of hypnotic states all day.

Knowing how to apply hypnosis for singular focus and deep relaxation can help you prepare for surgery; may reduce or possibly eliminate the amount of anesthesia you need; may keep you relaxed and stable during your procedure; may lessen and even eliminate post-operative pain; and often as not, may speed up recovery time. In particular,

expectant mothers can use hypnosis to reduce the fear, pain, and tension surrounding childbirth and replace these negatives with a predominantly peaceful, positive experience. Likewise, when trained professionals guide and support patients in the use of this tool, the patient become a vital part of the medical team. These are all good reasons why hypnosis should be part of a positive health care experience.

"You're Feeling Sleepy"...Not!

The first step toward this experience is understanding that hypnosis is not sleep. In fact, it's quite the contrary. Hypnosis is actually a way to awaken the power of the mind and use it to help the body. In hypnosis, you, with the help of a trained medical professional, learn to call upon the mind-body connection. You then use this connection to eliminate distractions, concentrate profoundly, and zero in on your health care needs.

For instance, you might focus on deep relaxation and slow rhythmic breathing to help keep your blood pressure down during a surgical procedure. If you're giving birth, you can use hypnosis to picture your body as a large, blooming flower that gently opens up and easily gives way for your baby's passage into this world. You can even use it to ask a specific body part for help. You might ask your lungs to breathe more slowly and deeply or, request that your stomach remain calm and undisturbed as you take various medications. The point is that you can use this altered state of consciousness to seek help from your body. A recent study, which is quite a wake-up call, shows why this is so important for patients undergoing invasive medical procedures and for the medical professionals assisting them.

Waking Up to the Power of Hypnosis

The study, reported in the respected medical journal *The Lancet*, was headed by Dr. Elvira Lang of Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Boston, and funded by the US National Institutes of Health. Dr. Lang and her colleagues found that patients who are

hypnotized while undergoing invasive medical procedures without a general anesthetic have more stable vital signs; require less pain medication; and leave the operating room sooner than those who are not hypnotized.

These results are based on two hundred forty-one people of comparable age and health status who were randomly assigned to three groups. Their procedures ranged from opening clogged arteries and veins to relieving blockages in the kidney drainage system. One group had their procedures under standard conditions. Another group received extra attention, and members of the third were trained in hypnosis. In the hypnosis group, each participant was guided through visualizations of pleasant scenes while undergoing their procedures. In addition, patients in all three groups were able to give themselves as much pain medication as they desired through an intravenous tube.

Remarkably, fifty percent of the hypnosis group required no drugs at all and the other fifty percent used only half the amount of medication administered during the traditional surgeries. In addition, unlike the patients in the other two groups, the hypnotized patients reported that their pain did not increase as surgery progressed. They also had fewer problems with blood pressure and heart rates. Plus, their operations finished an average of seventeen minutes sooner than those of the control patients.

Dr. Lang suggests that this time saving is due to the fact that surgeons weren't distracted as often by sedation problems, blood pressure fluctuations, or patients' attention demanding actions. Another benefit is that shorter surgeries and speedier recoveries save money. Fortunately, the advantages of hypnosis aren't limited to dollars and cents or beating the clock as you're wheeled out of the operating room.

Indeed, hypnosis supports you before, during, and after your procedure. Beforehand, it can help reduce anxiety, strengthen your focus, assist in building concentration, and aid you in visualizing a positive outcome. Hypnosis may boost your immune system as well. It also gives you a pain control option in place of or in addition to anesthesia. Moreover, it is appropriate for use in many kinds of procedures. Depending

on your individual situation, these may include childbirth, cancer treatments, dental implants, plastic surgery, MRIs (magnetic resonance imaging), and more. Best of all, hypnosis is safe at every stage and has no side effects.

While your operation is taking place, it helps dispel fear and, according to Dr. Lang's study, can aid you in keeping a steady heart rate and blood pressure. In addition, hypnosis can be used alone or in combination with medications, depending on your personal situation and on the advice of your medical team. When the two are used together, hypnosis helps keep you stable and relaxed. This may reduce the amount of drugs you need, which usually means fewer side effects and a shorter recovery time.

After surgery, hypnosis not only lessens pain but also can often eliminate it entirely. One cancer patient who was in the operating room ten hours had stable vital signs throughout his procedure and amazingly, reported no post-surgical discomfort.

But patients aren't the only ones who benefit. For the medical team, hypnosis reduces the risks and side effects that come from administering various drugs. This allows the team to spend more time focusing on the procedure itself. Hypnosis also calms the patient and the calmer the patient is, the calmer the medical team will be. Dr. Larry Goldman underscores this in his publication *Medical Hypnosis: An Introduction and Clinical Guide*, noting

"through the use of hypnosis the...patient becomes a valuable ally...greatly improving the odds for a successful, traumatic outcome...that reduces the stresses...for all concerned..."

One reason stress is reduced is because patients trained in hypnosis are better prepared for surgery and childbirth. Ultimately, they move more smoothly through procedures and into recovery, which benefits the patients and the medical staff alike. For all these reasons and more, the *Clinical Practice Guidelines for Acute Pain Management* published by the US. Department of Health and Human Services cites non-pharmacologic means of relief for pain and anxiety as an important health care tool.

Now like all such tools, hypnosis comes with important instructions.

The Hypnosis Tool Kit

While hypnosis may involve focusing on a spot on the ceiling or listening to an audiotape, the true tools are you, your hypnotherapist, and your willingness to enter into and take command of your hypnotic state for use during surgery or childbirth. You learn to do this with the help of a trained professional. This might be a psychologist skilled in hypnosis, a hypnotherapist, non-pharmacologic analgesia practitioner, skilled nurse, or another individual with appropriate training and medical expertise. Whatever the case, according to *Methods of Non-Pharmacologic Analgesia: A Source Book for Practitioners*, by Eleanor D. Laser, Ph.D. and Elvira Lang, M.D., your hypnotist has four basic goals.

The first is to put you at ease. This means relieving your anxiety, allaying your fears, and moving you into a state of readiness so you can use hypnosis effectively. Your therapist will start by putting herself in your shoes — or hospital slippers — as the case may be. She'll discuss your feelings, concerns, and motivations. You'll also get plenty of feedback and clarification. Best of all, this conversation should be easy. As your therapist encourages you and builds on your strengths, you'll form a rapport, which empowers you to learn hypnosis and apply it to the very best of your ability.

Your therapist's second goal is to prepare you for your specific procedure whether it's childbirth or an MRI. As part of this process, she'll help you with any problems you're anticipating; reinforce your willingness to cooperate during the procedure; help you get into the hypnotic state; and authorize the procedure to begin.

At each of these points, your therapist has a veritable treasure chest of techniques to assist you. For instance, if you anticipate problems with your surgery or, feel angry, anxious, or scared out of your wits, you are not in a resourceful state. In other words, you're not ready for hypnosis. Your therapist can help you get past these frustrations and

fears particularly if they're related to the equipment, the surgical suite, the medical technician, or some other factor directly related to your procedure.

If the problem is on a deeper level, the therapist is even more valuable. First, she can aid you in identifying the real source of your fears or negativity. In other words, your therapist can help you

Locate the specific, earlier association that's causing you trouble and redirect it so you're no longer controlled by that early recollection. Going through this process allows you to alter your focus to a neutral or, better yet, a positive point of view. How does it work?

Your therapist has many skills at her fingertips to help you take charge of the situation. He or she might have you do a mental body scan to locate the source of the trouble, and then you can ask that specific body part to share its concerns with you so you can work things out. Other techniques might include the use of eye movements to desensitize you to unpleasant memories; visualizations to give negative images new, positive meanings; working with deep breathing; talking through your fears; and more.

Whatever option you choose, once your concerns are resolved; you're receptive, and ready to move into the hypnotic state. To ease you in, your therapist might apply progressive relaxation; sensory awareness; a linkage of your conscious and unconscious minds; or other techniques. As you work together, you will discover the approach that feels, sounds and looks like it's right for you, and make no mistake about it, you are the key.

Why? Because all hypnosis is actually self-hypnosis. The therapist is present to support you and assist you as soon as your inner mind gives her — and you — permission. Once you are in this altered state of consciousness, the therapist will help you feel safe, warm, and as if you're on vacation. She'll also encourage you, anchor you, and be supportive in every way from helping you set and

Maintain your own, comfortable body temperature during the procedure to waking up feeling refreshed and relaxed.

Clearly, hypnosis for surgery and childbirth is a powerful tool and this is why you need to work with a skilled professional. Fortunately, many medical and dental schools, internships, and residency programs now offer training in hypnosis as does the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis and the Society of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, two professional organizations. In addition, extensive research is underway at Harvard, the University of Pennsylvania, and Stanford Medical School to learn more about how hypnosis works, because work, it surely does.

Stanley, a seventy-six year old patient at the University of Iowa Hospital in Iowa City, needed emergency surgery. His condition was complicated by the fact that he was deaf, had a mild organic brain syndrome, and advanced sclerosis of the liver, which prevented the use of anesthesia. His only option for pain relief was hypnosis.

Stanley's therapist quickly built an instant rapport, encouraged him, and began to induce the hypnotic state. She asked Stanley about his favorite place and he said it was the Statue of Liberty. Using imaging techniques, the therapist took Stanley on a trip to this awesome statue. Interweaving rich description and detail, she made the experience as real as possible, including the feel of the boat ride to the statue, the sight of ducks in the water, and the sounds of fellow tourists. Then the therapist took the process a step further.

She asked Stanley to become the statue.

Why? Because statues - and now Stanley - cannot feel pain. In addition, they are incapable of movement. As Stanley took on this persona, it kept him perfectly still and pain free during surgery. Then the therapist explained that the statue was weather-beaten and a special team was making repairs. She reminded Stanley that this work did not disturb the statue - or him - one bit. The repairs/surgery went on for more than three hours and Stanley didn't move a muscle, nor did he feel any pain. In short, hypnosis gave Stanley the control and relief he sought during his procedure and it can do something similar for you.

In fact, the major goal of medical hypnosis is to assist you in the surgical suite or birthing room. Your therapist will induce trance, tell the health care team when you're ready to begin, and then capitalize on the rapport you've built to encourage you and reinforce your hypnotic/resourceful state during the procedure. The therapist also works to deepen your comfort level. Now exactly where will she be when all this happens? Well, depending on the situation, she may be able to stay within touching distance of you. However, if your procedure is something like an MRI, her connection to you maybe through a microphone placed in the chamber. Regardless of her physical proximity, your therapist will help guide you to a place where you feel calm and comfortable, relaxed and confident.

Indeed, you maybe so confident, so prepared, that you don't necessarily need to have your therapist physically present. Instead, you might memorize and repeat a specific script or listen to a customized hypnosis tape that contains a passage like this:

"Imagine a place where you feel happy...somewhere that you've always wanted to be...it is...safe and peaceful to you...take the place in with your eyes, enjoying the colors, the scenery...whether it's sand or grass, a pine needles forest floor, a cozy armchair...and listening to the sound of the place, birds singing or leaves rustling, wind or music, crackling fire or crashing waves, just so your ears can become attuned to the wonderful sounds of this place that is so safe and peaceful to you."

You'll not only feel peaceful but relaxed, refreshed, and encouraged when your therapist reorients you to the waking state. This happens because after the procedure — but before you are fully awake — she gives you suggestions to reduce post-surgical pain, enhance your comfort level, and reinforce specific future behaviors that will help you heal. As you become totally reoriented — and this can happen slowly or quickly — the therapist will continue your rapport and thank you for your cooperation. Your commitment to hypnosis — to non-pharmacologic analgesia — has made everyone's job

safer and easier. This includes your own job to take the best possible care of your health and, if you're an expectant mother, the health of your baby.

Baby Yourself With Hypnosis for Childbirth

Using hypnosis to relax and control labor isn't simply a matter of babying yourself; it's actually good for you and your child. In fact, hypnosis can help you experience a healthier, more comfortable pregnancy. According to Larry Goldman, M.D., in *Medical Hypnosis: An Introduction and Clinical Guide*, it may help control nausea and vomiting, help adjust blood pressure to normal levels, may reduce the risk of premature delivery and cesarean section, help reduce or eliminate pain and the need for drugs during labor and delivery, may reduce the need for episiotomies and the instance of breech births, and may even aid in the control and prevention of postpartum depression. Best of all, hypnosis puts you in charge of your pregnancy and childbirth. It allows you to do things your way and helps you have the joyous, positive experience you've always dreamed of.

Exactly how does hypnosis help you achieve this? For starters, you can use it to relax. This controls stress, which helps stop the onset of nausea and keeps your stomach calm. You can even talk to your digestive system to help prevent vomiting and positively reinforce the importance of good nutrition for you and your baby.

Likewise, you and your hypnotherapist can work to prevent premature labor. Since this condition is often associated with stress, hypnosis can calm you down which, Dr. Goldman notes, may help to prolong your pregnancy. In addition, hypnosis may aid you in recognizing and controlling premature contractions by helping you relax the smooth muscles of the uterus. Also, if your doctor prescribes medication, hypnosis may help you reduce or eliminate

The side effects including nervousness and irritability. Just remember, if you're at risk for premature labor, it's important to

begin your hypnosis training early because the sooner you start using this powerful tool, the more helpful it may be.

You can also apply the power of hypnosis to high blood pressure (called hypertension), a potentially dangerous complication that sometimes arises during pregnancy. Your therapist can teach you to dilate your blood vessels to physically improve this condition, which may in turn help keep you out of the hospital. In fact, studies reported in *The Lancet*, 1984, show that women who use hypnosis to control hypertension have half the hospitalizations of women who don't. In addition, Dr. Goldman notes "the patient may...be taught to use hypnosis to dilate blood vessels, directly reducing peripheral resistance and decreasing mean arterial blood pressure...early hospitalization is avoided. Patients are able to keep their blood pressures at a safe level using rest, hydration and hypnosis... until delivery of a mature baby can be accomplished."

Your therapist can offer other helpful suggestions as well including techniques for talking to your body and being alert to the symptoms of high blood pressure including headaches, vision changes, increasing edema, or decreased fetal movement. In addition, hypnosis can be used in combination with bed rest, medication, or biofeedback depending on the advice of your medical team.

Now speaking of advice, you've probably received plenty of it regarding labor and delivery. Well-meaning but uninformed relatives, friends and neighbors have likely shared their gory horror stories. In addition, the media and peer pressure may have conditioned you to expect the worst. Fortunately, with hypnosis, you can show them they're wrong. In fact, hypnosis can make the whole birth experience seem more like a vacation. How so?

Drs. Roig and Garcia, developers of the "Hypnoreflexogenous Technique" for controlling contractions with hypnosis-induced relaxation; Dr. William Werner who introduced the technique in the United States; Dr. Grantly Dick-Read, well known author

of *Childbirth Without Fear*; and many other medical professionals are convinced that no normal body process, including birth, hurts. Furthermore, these experts believe that labor pain is a learned response. Fortunately, hypnosis can help you unlearn it and break the vicious cycle of fear, which causes tension, which tightens muscles and produces pain. Your therapist can show you how.

She can empower you to achieve the deep relaxation, which eliminates fear, tension, and pain, and puts you in control of the entire labor-delivery process. She can even give you a hypnotic suggestion to ignore negative comments from relatives, friends, and any medical staff who call it labor *pain* — and the therapist can teach your baby's father or your birth companion to assist you.

Indeed, the father/birth companion is an important part of the hypnosis team because he is your coach. Your therapist will teach him how to be a "hypnotechnician" so he can induce the hypnotic State, help you ignore negative comments, and stay relaxed. He will also learn to apply deepening techniques such as progressive Relaxation so he can work with the therapist and the two can support you throughout the entire labor and delivery process.

Now when should you and your husband/birth companion start your hypnosis training and how much do you need? That depends on you. You maybe part of couples class or have private sessions. With more complicated pregnancies, you may start your training early. It's also important to note that if your partner is not available, a skilled nurse, midwife, or obstetrician can fill this role and work with you and your therapist.

Whatever the case, you may learn many other things in addition to hypnosis techniques including: the cycles of pregnancy and childbirth, breathing for labor stages, posture training, the relationship between emotional and physical health, and affirmations. Why you may even take a pre-delivery hospital tour — it all depends on your needs and on the input of your hypnotherapist.

A key point the therapist may teach you is that contractions of the uterus are like contractions of any other muscle, including the heart. Now normally, muscles don't hurt when they contract. According to Drs. Roig, Garcia, Dick-Read, and Goldman, this means you can control each labor contraction. Indeed, Goldman emphasizes that "the goal...is...to empower the patient to experience labor the way she wishes and to always be in control."

One hypnotic control technique is to re-invent your contractions, perhaps making them feel like pressure and warmth or however you imagine them to be — even at the height of Labor. Hypnosis can also reinforce the idea that each contraction brings you closer to meeting your baby. As you move through the stages of childbirth, this thought may help you achieve a deeper and deeper state of relaxation.

From this deeply relaxed state, you may not only move more smoothly through labor and delivery, but may adapt more easily if there's a last minute change in the birthing plan. For instance, you might use hypnosis to remain in control during complications. If, for instance, your baby is breech as Dr. Goldman says happens in 3% of deliveries, hypnosis might be of great assistance. It may reduce the discomfort of turning the infant and may reduce or eliminate the chance of a cesarean section. In fact, Goldman notes that the average rate of cesarean sections in the United States is 20% to 30%, while the rate for hypnosis patients is less than 5%.

Likewise, you can use hypnosis to pace yourself, to help regulate breathing and changes in blood pressure. The amount of control is up to you. In fact, when you're deeply relaxed, the entire birth experience may even seem like:

"...You are on vacation, daydreaming, relaxed, and oh so comfortable. ...Hours seem like minutes and minutes seem like

Seconds and time passes quickly...With each contraction...you will relax even deeper...into the rich color of all of the purple hues as they wrap around you in complete and perfect anesthesia. Staying in the beautiful place you realize that you will only remember the pleasant things about labor and delivery. Your labor will seem short and your delivery a wonderful, pleasant experience...because you feel so good you will not have any maternity blues...you will be able to control Any bleeding that's excessive by turning down the vessels and later turning them back on when needed...there will be no Nausea or vomiting...each contraction will be a signal for you to experience relaxation even during the height of your labor...with each feeling of pressure and warmth, you will...go even deeper into this wonderful, tranquil place...this wonderful safe place that feels so calm..."

The script will vary depending on you and your therapist, but that calm feeling is the same. Why? Because you are in control. Since you are conscious, you are always aware of what's happening during labor and delivery. This allows you to be highly cooperative and to work beautifully with your childbirth team. In fact, you can work with them even more effectively because under hypnosis, you aren't distracted by the myth of fear, tension, and pain. In other words, you are focused and each contraction is a signal to become more deeply relaxed. As a result, time flies by. You're undisturbed by noise, distractions, or nausea. In fact, noise may actually deepen your relaxed state. With each labor stage your confidence grows. You can even keep the sensitive areas of your body practically numb. Feelings of security, contentment, and well being wash over you as you deliver your baby. Finally, as you hold your newborn, you Experience a wonderful sense of accomplishment and a pleasant feeling of tiredness.

This gentle, hypnotic mindset makes you feel so comfortable that you easily and positively bond with your baby. Bonding is crucial for your baby's health, notes David Chamberlain, Ph.D. , author of a book on the subject. Hypnosis can help you give this nurturing gift to yourself and your infant. Hypnosis gives you another gift too, because it can definitely help to eliminate postpartum blues.

According to Dr. Larry Goldman, "It is quite rare to see postpartum depression in a hypnosis mom...First the delivery is an extremely rewarding experience...Second, relaxation techniques...can be effective in alleviating postpartum stress and allowing the mother to obtain much needed rest. Third, having been in control throughout the labor and delivery process gives the new mom much needed confidence during the postpartum period."

Indeed, because hypnosis makes your delivery so rewarding, because relaxation techniques have eliminated fear, and you have controlled the labor/delivery process, you've gained the confidence you need to handle your baby. Dr. Goldman adds that using hypnosis for labor and delivery has the added benefit of improving your breast-feeding abilities because you feel so relaxed and confident. Your therapist can give you some hypnotic suggestions in this regard and can also provide suggestions for eliminating depression and having more energy.

And "more" really sums it up. With hypnosis, childbirth maybe more comfortable; the father/birth companion has more of a role; after birth you may feel more refreshed and energized; there are more positive outcomes for you and your baby; and you achieve a calmer, more peaceful birth environment. In addition, hypnosis produces more good-natured babies who are better sleepers and eaters. The birth process is more joyful and serene, less stressful and tense. There may also be fewer complications, less need for medication, and easier resolutions — all because hypnosis allows you to relax more than any other method.

The relaxation produced by hypnosis has tremendous advantages for the birth team too. As Dr. Goldman noted, the number of breech presentations and cesarean births maybe reduced. In addition, since hypnosis reduces or eliminates the need for medication, it's often healthier for the baby as there is no drug depression of the infant's breathing. There are also fewer episiotomies because everything is relaxed. If you do need one, it's easier for you to cooperate because you are in control. In fact,

Hypnosis makes it easier for you to cooperate with any directions and this greatly assists the birth team's efforts.

As a result, childbirth is safer, less stressful, and more rewarding for all involved. Everyone feels a greater sense of satisfaction. Best of all, you have more energy and vitality during recovery, plus the lifelong confidence that comes from knowing you chose a great alternative for you and your baby.

Conclusion

Now that you have learned something about hypnosis, you can apply this knowledge to your own health care situation. A skilled, Therapist can tailor your training program and coordinate with your medical team. In fact, hypnosis can increase the rapport and communication between you and your caregivers. What's more important, it makes you an active participant in your own procedure. Whether your surgery or childbirth takes place in a hospital, clinic, your doctor's office, or at home; whether the procedure is major or minor; hypnosis gives you the confidence and energy, the comfort and serenity to support positive outcomes in surgery and childbirth. These positive outcomes, these steps toward improved health care, are what the phenomenal power of hypnosis is all about.

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