

Introduction

When looking for recent studies relating to the effectiveness of hypnosis, we quickly come across a problem. To be considered the gold standard of research, scientists look for the randomised, double-blind placebo-controlled study. Unfortunately, unlike a sugar pill designed to mimic medication, it is very hard to disguise a therapeutic approach such as hypnosis. Despite this there are some good studies out there. Included are some meta-analyses & some one-off studies that support the SFH approach.

A meta-analysis compares a lot of independent studies to test whether the outcomes agree. In 2003, one such meta-analysis from the University of Konstanz, Germany, looked into the efficacy of hypnotherapy across the board. The researchers, Flammer & Bongartz, referred to text anxiety, psychosomatic illness, pain control & smoking cessation during traditional medical treatments. It is disappointing to note that very little of the better research studies(19%) used Eriksonian hypnosis, but it is still worth adding here.

444 studies were initially considered, but this was narrowed down to 57 of the best quality-controlled trials for the meta-analysis. These showed that on average hypnotherapy achieved **at least 64% success** compared to 37% improvement among untreated control groups. *Flammer and Bongartz, the university of Konstanz, Germany 2003*

Anxiety

A number of independent studies suggest that a variety of different approaches can help reduce the symptoms of anxiety. One study by *Williams et al* in 2001 found meditation to be effective in lowering anxiety, this was confirmed by a later study in 2006 by *Krisanaprakornkit et al*. Another study, this time by *Burns et al* in 2002 showed that listening to relaxing and classical music could reduce anxiety. This finding was confirmed in 2007 by *Labbé et al*. Also in 2007, *Lehrer et al* found that progressive muscle relaxation could lessen anxiety related symptoms. While most recently, a study by Richardson & Rothstein in 2008 found that cognitive behavioural techniques could contribute to a reduction in symptoms of anxiety. The good news is that Solution Focused Hypnotherapy employs all these techniques in its approach, adding more weight to what we do.

Another recent study by Dziembowska in 2016 focused on the biological evidence supporting the reduction of anxiety related symptoms. 41 young male athletes were randomly divided into two groups (20 in one, 21 in the other). One group received no interventions at all, the control group. The other group were classed as the experimental group who received treatment. The treatment started with an explanation of the mind-body relationship followed by encouragement to relax sufficiently to slow down their breathing. They were urged to focus on more positive emotions completing the exercise with affirmations & information about the benefits of their training. I'm sure you'll spot the similarities between the treatment the athletes received and what we as SFH do in our sessions? After 21 days the study found that the athletes receiving treatment reduced their anxiety levels compared to the control group. Testing on the EEG machine showed positive changes in Alpha and Theta brainwaves. Alpha brainwaves support improved cognitive awareness and processing, resulting in better self-regulation. The conclusion by the

researchers was that this type of approach was helpful in lowering stress levels in young male athletes.

Dziembowska, I., Izdebski, P., Rasmus, A., Brudny, J., Grzelczak, M. & Cysewski, P. (2016). Effects of Heart Rate Variability Biofeedback on EEG Alpha Asymmetry and Anxiety Symptoms in Male Athletes: A Pilot Study. Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback, 41, 141–150.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

There is a growing body of evidence to suggest that hypnotherapy may be particularly helpful in the treatment of IBS. The condition is characterised by non-organic abdominal pain, distension, constipation, distension, and a feeling of urgent need to evacuate the bowels.

While there are plenty of examples in the scientific literature attesting to the usefulness of clinical hypnosis, a study published in the Gut, it worth referring to. The study involved 204 people suffering from Irritable Bowel Syndrome. 58% of the men & 75% of the women reported significant symptom relief straight after completing treatment (which consisted of 12 weekly hour long hypnosis sessions.) Of those who reported initial relief of symptoms, more than 80% were still much improved up to 6 years later. Importantly fewer than 10% of the participants tried other treatments after the hypnotherapy study.

W M Gonsalkorale, Whorwell et al, University of South Manchester, Manchester UK (Gut Journal November 2003)

In 2020 Leeds Gastroenterology institute completed a meta-analysis into psychological therapies & the treatment of IBS. Forty-one independent studies containing 4072 participants were analysed. The trials only recruited IBS sufferers who failed to improve over a period of time & suffered a degree of pain. CBT & gut directed hypnotherapy were found to be more effective than routine care, education &/or support. As we use CBT techniques within SFH work, we can be confident that SFH is highly effective for reducing symptoms of IBS.

C J Black et al Leeds Gastroenterology Institute & St James University Hospital Leeds.

Whorwell et al (2003) studied 204 patients over the course of 6 years. A prospective questionnaire was completed to score symptoms, quality of life, anxiety and depression before immediately after and for up to 6 years following hypnotherapy. The results showed that 71% initially responded to treatment, of these 81% continued to experience improvement with 19% claiming slight deterioration in symptoms. All items previously scored were significantly improved at follow up regardless of the period. There was also a significant reduction in medication use and consultation rates.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/14570733/> *W M Gonsalkorale¹, V Miller, A Afzal, P J Whorwell Dept medicine University hospital of South Manchester*

Cancer

Studies have shown that hypnosis is effective in improving the quality of life for terminally ill cancer patients. A study in England comprised fifty terminally ill cancer patients divided into two groups. Both groups received the standard pharmaceuticals administered to terminal cancer patients, but one group also participated in weekly hypnosis sessions. This study

CPHT Solution Focused Hypnotherapy Training TM ©2002-2023

found that the group of patients who participated in hypnosis reported a substantially higher quality of life, including lowered depression and anxiety, than the group that was treated with pharmaceuticals alone

Lioosi, C., & White, P. (2006). Efficacy of clinical hypnosis in the enhancement of quality of life of terminally ill cancer patients. Contemporary Hypnosis, 18(3), 145-160.

A pilot study has recently been completed into whether teaching self-hypnosis can enhance the quality of life for breast cancer sufferers. 23 women with breast cancer were introduced to hypnosis through a 4-week series of sessions. During this time the women learnt about hypnosis and the various techniques for relaxation and distraction. As a result of the classes, the women reported fewer side effects to the treatments. They felt better, were happier and less nervous about the cancer and their treatment. Specifically, they found that they had less swelling and tenderness, less shortness of breath and more able to enjoy life & sleep well. 86% said that they found the classes useful while 100% said that their quality of life had improved as a result. The classes explained to the women why they felt like they did and how they could change that. This is very similar to our explanation of the brain. They learnt about the trance state in a similar way to our explanation of trance in the IC. All the women were given a CD to listen to at night, as we give out a relaxation mp3. They were given homework that required them to write a list of what they wanted to achieve; this is similar to our miracle question. I'm sure you'll agree that there are a lot of parallels between this study and our SFH sessions. *Forester-Miller, H. (2017). Self-Hypnosis Classes to Enhance the Quality of Life of Breast Cancer Patients, American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis, 60:1, 18-32, DOI:10.1080/00029157.2017.1316234*

PTSD

'Various case studies have reported the successful use of self-hypnosis in treating post-traumatic stress disorder, public speaking, simple phobia & panic disorder. Overall, previous speculations & empirical findings suggest that increases in a sense of self-reliance, self-control & self-efficacy may be central to the alleviation of anxiety through self-hypnosis.

Lucy O'Neil et al 'Treating anxiety with self-hypnosis & relaxation, Contemporary Hypnosis 1999 vol 16(2):68

A systematic review & meta-analysis of the efficacy of hypnotherapy in the treatment of PTSD used literature searches to find 47 articles. However, only 6 were experiments testing the efficacy of hypnosis based treatments. A meta-analysis was applied to post intervention assessment results and 4-week follow-ups. A large effect in favour of hypnosis-based treatment was found for the studies that reported the post-test results. The temporal stability of the effect remains strong, as reflected by the 4-week follow-up assessments and also by long-term evaluations (e.g., 12 months). Hypnosis appears to be effective in alleviating PTSD symptoms.

Tudor-Ştefan Rotaru & Andrei Rusu (2016) A Meta-Analysis for the Efficacy of Hypnotherapy in Alleviating PTSD Symptoms, International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 64:1, 116-136, DOI: 10.1080/00207144.2015.1099406

Another study evaluated the benefits of add-on hypnotherapy in patients with chronic PTSD. Thirty-two PTSD patients treated by SSRI antidepressants and supportive psychotherapy were randomized to 2 groups: 15 patients in the first group received Zolpidem 10 mg nightly for 14 nights. While 17 patients in the hypnotherapy group were treated by symptom-

oriented hypnotherapy twice weekly (1.5-hour sessions for 2 weeks). There was a significant main effect of the hypnotherapy treatment with PTSD symptoms as measured by the Post traumatic Disorder Scale. This effect was preserved at follow-up 1 month later. Additional benefits for the hypnotherapy group were decreases in intrusion and avoidance reactions and improvement in all sleep variables assessed. *Abramowitz et al The International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 01 Jul 2008, 56(3):270-280*

Weight Loss

In 2018 *Milling, Gover & Moriarty* conducted two meta-analyses reporting on the efficacy of hypnosis for weight loss. In the first meta-analysis, 14 trials were considered, each with a hypnosis group and a control group (no treatment). At the end of the trial, Hypnosis was found to be a very effective method of weight loss. 6 of the 14 trials also showed that weight loss was maintained long after the end of the trial. Overall, the participants in the hypnosis group lost more weight than 94% of the control group. Perhaps more importantly, the hypnosis group maintained their weight loss long after the study concluded with 81% losing more weight than the control group at follow up.

In the second meta-analysis, the use of CBT (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) was compared with CBT and hypnosis for weight loss. Greater weight loss was achieved when CBT was combined with the hypnosis. The results showed that at the end of 11 trials their weight loss was greater than for those who received just CBT group. While in 12 of the trials the weight loss continued for the combined group despite a long follow up period. Overall, 60% more weight was lost by the CBT & hypnosis group compared to the CBT alone group at the end of active treatment. Interestingly the combined group lost more weight than 79% of participants just receiving CBT at the end of the long follow-up period. As we use CBT techniques along with hypnosis, we can be reassured that SFH is effective at helping clients with weight loss, long after the sessions have finished.

Milling, Gover and Moriarty, February 2018 The Effectiveness of Hypnosis as an Intervention for Obesity: A Meta-Analytic Review Psychology of Consciousness: Theory, Research, and Practice 5(1) DOI:10.1037/cns0000139

Pain Management

A 2010 study by *Berger et al* conducted at a Swiss hospital showed that hypnosis is an effective treatment of pain management. The study analysed 40 ICU burn patients whose pain was measured using the Visual Analog Scale (VAS). These patients were also using prescribed opioid medications. Doctors were able gradually decrease the dose of these medications in the patients who proceeded with hypnotherapy sessions as they reported less pain than the control patients who did not use hypnotherapy. This study also found that the patients who proceeded with hypnotherapy experienced reduced anxiety, needed fewer skin grafts, and overall, this resulted in lower hospital costs

Berger, M. M., Davadant, M., Marin, C., Wasserfallen, J. B., Pinget, C., Maravic, P., ... & Chiolerio, R. L. (2010). Impact of a pain protocol including hypnosis in major burns. Burns, 36(5), 639-646.

Daniel P. Kohen in the International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis showed that self-hypnosis is an effective treatment for recurring headaches. In addition, this study showed that pain-relieving benefits of self-hypnosis lasted for many years after subjects received self-hypnosis training. Subjects of this study also reported that self-hypnosis improved other areas of their lives, including stress reduction and a general positive attitude.

Kohen, D. P. (2010). Long-term follow-up of self-hypnosis training for recurrent headaches: what the children say. *Intl. Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 58(4), 417-432.

Fibromyalgia

What is Fibromyalgia? It is considered to be a complex chronic pain syndrome where the pain is widespread with areas of localised tenderness. Poor sleep leading to fatigue (70-90% sufferers), muddled thinking & psychological distress also contribute to make this condition difficult to manage. While there appears to be a genetic link for fibromyalgia, it seems to be triggered by environmental influences. These influences include physical and emotional stress and/or illness.

The study by *Picard et al* in 2013 used only participants that had their diagnosis confirmed by a rheumatologist. If other pain-causing conditions, such as arthritis were present, then the patient was excluded from the trial. Participants were either allocated to the hypnosis group or the control group (waiting list). Those in the hypnosis group received 5 sessions of hypnotherapy. Specifically, the hypnosis contained suggestions about managing the emotional stress caused by their fibromyalgia. The participants in the hypnotherapy group recorded a significant reduction in their perception of pain. The quality of their sleep improved along with an improvement in their general well-being. The researchers concluded that hypnotherapy helped to improve the cognitive elements of fibromyalgia. Hypnotherapy was also shown to reduce the anxiety and depression suffered by the participants. They were less likely to negatively forecast the future relating to their condition and its symptoms.

Picard, P., Jusseaume, C. & Boutet, M. (2013). Hypnosis for Management of Fibromyalgia. International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis, 61, (1), 111-123. DOI: 10.1080/00207144.2013.729441.

Non-Cardiac Chest Pain

A 2006 study by Whorwell et al trialled hypnotherapy for the treatment of non-cardiac chest pain. This is a debilitating condition with high psychological morbidity. The study looked at these sufferers of angina-like chest pain in whom coronary angiography & oesophageal reflux were not factors. Twenty eight patients received 12 sessions of hypnotherapy or placebo medication plus supportive therapy over a 17 week period. The primary measured outcome measured was a global assessment of chest pain improvement; additionally, scores were recorded for quality of life, pain severity and frequency, anxiety, depression and the use of medication. The results showed that 12 of 15 (80%) of treatment group and 3 of 13 (23%) of the control group experienced global improvements in pain with significant reduction in intensity of pain. The secondary outcomes of general wellbeing and reduction in medication usage also showed significantly greater improvement.

<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/16627548/>

Children

In 2017 *Bonvanie et al* reviewed a total of 4098 papers for quality relating to unexplained physical symptoms in children. The papers identified children that had a range of symptoms lasting for between 7 months and 4 years. The symptoms included the following both general and abdominal pain, tension headaches, chronic fatigue symptoms and fibromyalgia. The study showed that using the techniques we use as Solution Focused Hypnotherapists significantly reduced the level of symptoms. School absence and disability were also improved. The techniques in question were relaxation, focusing on the future and reframing the symptoms.

Bonvanie, I. J., Kallesøe, K. H., Janssens, K. A., Schröder, A., Rosmalen, J. G., & Rask, C. U. (2017). Psychological interventions for children with functional somatic symptoms: a systematic review and meta-analysis. The Journal of Pediatrics.

A study by *Hunt et al* in 2011 looked at the use of hypnotherapy with children in a medical/clinical setting. Hypnotherapy was found to be consistently effective in treating a variety of symptoms. It often reduced the length of time a child needed to stay in hospital. The child was often less distressed, and hypnotherapy helped with the treatment of pain. Post-operative nausea and vomiting were reduced, minimising the need for antiemetic medication. Bed wetting and bladder control (enuresis) improved with the hypnotherapy. Hypnotherapy was also found to be effective in preparing the child for anaesthetic.

Hunt, K & Ernst, E. (2011). The evidence-base for complementary medicine in children: a critical overview of systematic reviews. Archives of Disease in Childhood, 96, 769-776

Hypnotherapy in palliative care

In 2016 Maria Brugnolli completed a review into the use of clinical hypnosis in palliative care. The hypnosis was compared with a variety of other approaches. These included: standard care, other supportive therapies, education or progressive muscle relaxation. Her review concluded that patients suffering from any serious illness that included any form of distress should be offered clinical hypnosis as a part of their palliative care. Her findings suggested that hypnosis not only provided relief from physical suffering including pain, but also from spiritual and psychological suffering. According to Maria Brugnolli, hypnosis can be shown to help the patient to live an active life for as long as possible. The lack of negative side effects from clinical hypnosis also contribute to the patient's quality of life.

Brugnoli, M. P. (2016). Clinical hypnosis for palliative care in severe chronic diseases: A review and the procedures for relieving physical, psychological and spiritual symptoms. Annals of Palliative Medicine, 5(4), 280-297. doi:10.21037/apm.2016.09.04

Hypnosis and sleep

In 2008, *Schlarb et al*, studied a group of adolescents with insomnia. The study was designed to test whether insomnia could be helped by using hypnotherapy. The results of the study showed that the amount of time that participants needed to fall asleep reduced. It also showed that those people who woke during the night were able to get back to sleep more quickly. More of the adolescents using hypnotherapy stayed asleep longer during the night. It is important to note that the effects of the study were long-lasting. When followed up at intervals of 3, 6 & 12 months, the participants continued to report better sleep overall.

Schlarb, A. A., Hust, C., Hautzinger, M. (2008). Just: a behavioral-hypnotherapy program for adolescents 11-16 years. Journal of sleep research, 17, 126-126

More recently in 2017, *Friedrich et al* completed a systemic review into a variety of psychological interventions to improve sleep. Friedrich and his colleagues found that using hypnotherapy or Cognitive Behavioural Therapy techniques improved the sleep of college students. The authors commented that they believed that a combination of the two approaches would bring about the strongest results. As Solution Focused Hypnotherapists we use some CBT techniques alongside hypnotherapy. This suggests that we are already offering a very effective approach to help people who are suffering from insomnia.

Friedrich A et al (2017) ,Let's talk about sleep: a systematic review of psychological interventions to improve sleep in college students.'

Dental Phobia

In 2015 Halsband & Wolf conducted a study using fMRI to identify the areas of the brain that are triggered when patients suffer from an extreme phobic response. In this case the study specifically looked at dental phobias. The study used two groups of people; one containing phobia sufferers and the other with people whose anxiety was under control. Both groups were tested for two different types of noise: dental surgery noise vs general household electrical noise. As well as this, a further two conditions were tested: one using hypnotherapy relaxation techniques and the other where no techniques were used. In all cases, the parties were being scanned by the fMRI, with researchers focusing on four areas of the brain: the Hippocampus, Amygdala, Anterior Cingulate Cortex (ACC or Secretary) and Insula Cingulate Cortex. Only the dental phobia group showed elevated activity in all 4 areas when subjected to the dental surgery noises. During the hypnotherapy relaxation techniques this same group showed a reduction in activity in the same four regions compared with the other group. This confirms that hypnotherapy is effective in the treatment of dental phobias.

Halsband, U., & Wolf, T. G. (2015). Functional changes in brain activity after hypnosis in patients with dental phobia. Journal of Physiology-Paris, 109(4-6), 131-142. doi:10.1016/j.jphysparis.2016.10.00

Smoking Cessation

Hypnosis has been shown to be effective for smoking cessation. A study conducted by the American Lung Association of Ohio, showed positive results from a single hypnotherapy session. Over 2800 smokers participated in this study. Participants were contacted one month after the hypnotherapy session & asked to report their progress. Over 20% of the participants reported not smoking at all in the month following the hypnotherapy session. It is worth noting that unlike SFH, these results do not include a psychotherapy element.

Ahijevych et al (2000) Descriptive outcomes of the American Lung Association of Ohio, hypnotherapy smoking cessation program. International Journal of Clinical & Experimental Hypnosis 48(4) 374-387.

In a study conducted at the San Francisco Veteran Affairs Medical Centre, hypnosis was found to be an effective therapy for smoking cessation. The subjects in this study participated in either hypnosis or behavioural counselling in order to quit smoking. The participants were then interviewed six and twelve months after their respective treatments. The study showed that the hypnosis participants experienced a significantly greater success rate than the behavioural counselling participants (*Carmody, T., et al., 2007*).

Carmody, T. P., Duncan, C., Simon, J. A., Solkowitz, S., Huggins, J., Lee, S., & Delucchi, K. (2008). Hypnosis for smoking cessation: a randomized trial. Nicotine & tobacco research, 10(5), 811-818.

Controlling Alcohol

Hypnosis has been found to be effective in the treatment of alcohol abuse. In a study conducted at the Hospital of the West Indies, patients were asked to complete an intensive hypnotherapy program aimed at stopping their alcohol abuse. In this study, 77% of participants had stopped drinking and when contacted one year later, were still able to abstain from drinking (Barnaby, L., & Gibson, R.C., 2008).

Barnaby, L., & Gibson, R. C. (2008). Factors affecting completion of a 28-day inpatient substance abuse treatment programme at the University Hospital of the West Indies. West Indian Medical Journal, 57(4), 364-368.

Self-Esteem

The use of hypnosis has been found to be successful at improving self-esteem in a study conducted at the University of Stellenbosch. The results of the study showed that the use of hypnosis caused a significant improvement in the self-esteem of the students who participated in the study.

De Vos et al (2009) Hypnosis induced mental training programmes as a strategy to improve the self-concept of students. Higher Education 57 (2) 141-154

Blood Pressure

A 2011 study showed that hypnosis was an effective treatment for lowering blood pressure. This study involved non-medicated patients, patients on hypertension medication 7 patients who only used hypnosis to treat their symptoms. Of all these patients, non-medicated patients showed no improvement, patients on hypertension medication showed improved symptoms and patients who were administered hypnosis showed a complete elimination of symptoms. These patients were taught self-hypnosis techniques in order to continue these effects at home.

(Herdis, L et al 2011) Deabler, HL, Fidel E, Dillenkoffer, RL & Elder ST (1973) The use of relaxation & hypnosis in lowering high blood pressure. American Journal of Clinical Hypnosis 16(2) 75-83

Asthma

Hypnosis has also been shown to be effective in the treatment of asthma. While normally treated with prescription medication, many asthma sufferers seek a more cost effective, safer alternative. A study conducted by Davis, California School of Medicine showed hypnosis to be an effective alternative to pharmaceuticals in the treatment of asthma. The study also mentions that previous studies have consistently shown that hypnosis produces positive effects in asthma patients and that continuing self-hypnosis is effective in maintaining symptom relief.

(Hackman, R.M., et.al., 2000). Hackman, R. M., Stern, J. S., & Gershwin, M. E. (2000). Hypnosis and asthma: a critical review. Journal of Asthma, 37(1), 1-15.

To Summarise

“The variety of applications for hypnosis as a treatment for both psychological and medical conditions is almost endless. So many studies have been conducted that empirically support the effectiveness of hypnosis as a treatment for such a wide array of conditions that it is now generally considered to be a legitimate treatment option for patients with many advantages. Among the most notable of these advantages are the fact that hypnosis is very cost-effective as compared to most clinical procedures, and can also be safer than pharmaceutical options, as there are no known physical side effects” (Lynn, S. J., et.al., 2008).

Hurwitz, T. D., Mahowald, M. W., Schenck, C. H., & Schluter, J. L. (1991). A retrospective outcome study and review of hypnosis as treatment of adults with sleepwalking and sleep terror. Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease.