

Hypnosis, mind-body therapies and psychological support  
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When our clinical psychologists and psychotherapists talk about "*treatment*," it is important to clarify one thing. **The main person doing the treatment will be you.** We propose an active approach to treatment, where you will need to be ready to take action.

Our perception of reality is actually created by our neurons. Chronic pain is almost always a breakdown in the body's alarm systems. It involves you as a whole person, your mental universe, your representations of the world, your culture, and your history. Together, we are going to work on these representations in order to change them.

Hypnosis and self-hypnosis will be part of this process, but by no means the only part. Considering hypnosis in isolation would be extremely simplistic.

You need to come to understand the mechanisms of pain. Pain increases stress and anxiety; you need to learn to be able to reduce them, to practice a form of rehabilitation training for the brain.

In order to do that, we will teach you to recognize, feel, identify and locate your body's unconscious contraction mechanisms and more; and how to recognize, perhaps, reminiscences of traumatic events that are expressed through the body.

You will learn, through the techniques of hypnosis and sophrology, to create a "place of safety". You will learn to use visualization techniques that can saturate your brain with messages designed to gradually turn off your nervous system's alarm system.

You are going to learn all of this, but only you can put it into practice. For this process will need to work regularly and persistently.

Often, patients are not understood by the family members and medical staff around them. It is not uncommon for a patient to be told "*there's nothing wrong, it's all in your head*" for example. This kind of reaction is completely inappropriate. Long-lasting pain of this kind can be disconcerting, but it is anything but imaginary.

It is however perfectly true that **everything is always "in your head"**. Your chronic pain is a perception created by your neurons: it is a reaction, a memory and an emotion all at once...

The good news is that if your brain is wrong, you can learn to trick your brain and modify your perceptions in order to improve your quality of life.

Learning to manage your chronic pain involves building a multifaceted care path, and adopting mind-body exercises such as mental rehabilitation training, hypnosis, and meditation...

Each of these approaches to treatment starts with the body. The physical body, thoughts and emotions are actually closely linked and in constant communication by means of chemical secretions and nerve signals...

Thought and cognition have an influence on the immune system, and stress has an influence on the cardiovascular system...

The mind-body techniques that we will share with you, such as hypnosis or mindfulness meditation, lead to changes in how the brain works. They are long-term, persistent changes.

Hypnosis is one of these mind-body therapies, and it is particularly recommended in the treatment of chronic pain.

It is a technique that uses suggestions that are transferred through the body to the mind.

Some definitions of hypnosis cast it as "*modification of consciousness*": it would probably be more correct to say "*hypnotic process*".

From the point of view of the brain and the nervous system, there are actually two kinds of attention: "focused" attention and "general" attention.

The former is necessarily narrow and selective, the latter is more concerned with registering sensation. It draws on all of the body's sensory abilities.

The effects of the hypnotic state involves the brain circuits of relaxation and that of attention.

Under hypnosis, brain activity is by no means slowed down. In some ways, the state observed is like sleep, in other ways like wakefulness. In order to reach this sleep-like state which is characteristic of hypnosis, you need to let go of your control over mind, body and judgement.

With the development of functional brain imaging (functional MRI, PET scan), it has been shown that the hypnotic state is different to sleep, and that it involves a particular kind of cerebral functioning that modulates the activity of certain areas of the brain.

**Hypnosis is an innate ability that we all use in our everyday lives. It is a more or less forgotten skill that everyone can rediscover and develop!**

Contrary to a widespread misconception, you do not lose control under hypnosis. It is absolutely impossible to agree to do something that goes against your principles or your conscious will under hypnosis.

Some patients are more or less receptive or resistant than others. Remember: 'hypnosis is also a form of learning'. From the first session onwards, it develops differently in different people.

Consulting a psychological hypnotherapist is particularly recommended as part of the care for chronic pain. It is important that you learn different techniques to modulate your symptoms. They include hypnotherapy and practising self-hypnosis, but there are others. It has been shown that the techniques of hypnosis, brain rehabilitation training, mindfulness meditation, EMDR, taking up a moderate level of sport (with the agreement of the doctor and the physiotherapist),

Each patient takes ownership of their stories and their pain, even if the mental and psychological mechanisms do not change. A patient who has experienced multiple physical and psychological stresses, and has for years, even since childhood, been in a state of non-identified post traumatic stress, will not react in the same way as a patient who goes through periods of depression from time to time.

The goal of the process that we will undertake together is to learn to use techniques that modulate pain significantly, to learn how to live with it, to be able to socialize and work again...

*Here are some ideas to get you started:*

- You need to be aware of your body, to develop your ability to feel that it is your own body, through your skin, your joints, your muscles, your organs, you will gradually refine your map of your body. This, in turn, will enable you to visualize and rediscover consciousness of certain parts of your body.
- The words and metaphors that you use have a direct impact on your perception of pain. Some phrases send a threat message to your brain. Learn how to speak differently to reassure your brain. For example, saying "*discomfort*" or "*inconvenience*" instead of "*pain*" produces an effect. Follow this path and set yourself the goal of doing it in a systematic way.
- Remember: the brain does not differentiate between a movement which has been made and a movement which has been visualized. The same areas of the brain are activated if you walk or if you think of yourself walking... Every movement you make in safety (visualizing it first) will help you to re-train your nervous system. Little by little, the nerves will become desensitized.

Recommended reading:

- La douleur, je m'en sors. Comprendre et agir. Prof. Serge Perrot
- Méditer jour après jour. Christophe André
- Pain is really strange. Steve Haines. Sophie Standing.
- Anxiety is really strange. Steve Haines. Sophie Standing.
- Trauma is really strange. Steve Haines. Sophie Standing.
- Chronic pain: identification, assessment and referral of patient with chronic pain syndrome (available on the Haute Autorité de Santé website)