



**Hypnosis Myths **DEBUNKED****  
**by Top Experts from**  
**Around the World**

**A Research Study**

## **Disclaimer**

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## The Myths Debunked

**Myth:** A person in a hypnotic state does not know what is going on around him/her. He/She has totally tuned out the surroundings.

**Debunked:** A person in a hypnotic state can hear everything that they would ordinarily hear. He/She does have his/her eyes closed, but other than that, he/she is aware of the surroundings.

**Myth:** You will not remember anything that happens.

**Debunked:** Under normal circumstances there is no reason why you would forget what has occurred during hypnosis, however the "deeper" you go into hypnosis, the more likely you are to not pay attention to what is going on around you. You will be aware of what is happening and still be able to reject suggestions during this time, but may not focus on your surroundings. Only if you are given a suggestion to not remember and you find that suggestion acceptable will you forget. In fact, most people report having a heightened sense of awareness, concentration and focus, and can even hear more acutely during a session.

**Myth:** I've never been hypnotized.

**Debunked:** Every person naturally enters a state of hypnosis at least twice everyday: just before falling asleep at night, and upon awaking every morning, before getting out of bed. Most people easily enter 'Environmental Hypnosis' while at the movies, watching TV, driving on the highway, or while reading a good book. A therapist just utilizes this natural focused state of relaxation to facilitate therapeutic change.

**Myth:** Not everyone can be hypnotized.

**Debunked:** We have a lot of experience with hypnosis, and have only found a handful of people who have struggled to go into hypnosis; however they did achieve at least a light state of hypnosis. We find that the two most likely things to inhibit a person from going into hypnosis are fear and trying too hard to go into hypnosis. With these people we believe that more sessions would eventually show them how to achieve a deep level of hypnosis.

**Myth:** During hypnosis you are asleep or unconscious.

**Debunked:** During hypnosis you are not asleep (or unconscious) and you will be able to hear and to think at all times. Although your body is very relaxed, your mind is actually more alert than usual in a state of heightened awareness and focus and you are fully aware of what is happening around you. There is no loss of consciousness and you can control your responses and level of involvement in the process. Generally, a person under hypnosis feels as if their body has gone to sleep but their mind is still aware, alert and awake.

**Myth:** You lose control or give control to the hypnotist.

**Debunked:** Crazy news stories, stage hypnotists and gossip have created the illusion that you lose control in hypnosis. Under hypnosis you will not be able to do anything which goes against your personal values or beliefs. If you are asked to do something unacceptable to your values, your mind will simply reject it and you will come out of hypnosis immediately. In fact, when hypnotized, you are relaxed and focused – and able to choose to get up and walk away at any time. You choose to give your attention to the hypnotist, and you can withdraw it at any time.

**Myth:** Hypnosis can cure or solve anything.

**Debunked:** Hypnosis is a powerful tool but sadly it cannot cure everything. It can help facilitate change by putting a person in touch with their subconscious mind and creative abilities. However, it cannot enable them to do what they don't know how to do. It can only help in better accessing those resources they do already possess.

**Myth:** You will feel “zonked out.”

**Debunked:** Hypnosis doesn't feel much different to how you feel right now reading the words in this sentence. Many people expect to feel "zonked out" and are therefore disappointed when they don't as they feel that it "didn't work". Most people report feeling mentally and physically calm and relaxed and describe the process as very pleasant.

**Myth:** Hypnosis can be used to retrieve long forgotten memories.

**Debunked:** If you believe this one, then you're in very good company. Many members of the public think this is true, as do some psychologists and many hypnotherapists themselves. Except that nowadays most people “in the know” think that the hypnotic trance isn't much good for accurately retrieving memories. *That scene in the movie where a hypnotist helps the victim see the killer's face is pure Hollywood: entertaining but total fiction.*

**Myth:** A pocket watch is necessary for hypnosis.

**Debunked:** Whilst hypnosis can sometimes be induced by swinging a pocket watch back and forth while suggesting that the client become "very sleepy", more reliable, effective, and quicker methods have been discovered. The pocket watch method that you may have seen in the movies is not designed to obtain hypnosis and if the client does go into hypnosis it is due to expectancy rather than the pocket watch.

**Myth:** Hypnosis can brainwash you.

**Debunked:** Brain-washing involves prolonged periods of extreme physical stress and discomfort to the point where eventually the victim has a breakdown. A brainwashed person responds like a robot to any command and is incapable of analytical thinking. Hypnosis, on the contrary, is achieved by helping the client to become as extremely comfortable and relaxed as possible. The objective of hypnosis is achieved with cooperation not blind obedience. The hypnotist is not your boss or master, he or she works with you to help you achieve your goals.

**Myth:** You can get stuck in hypnosis.

**Debunked:** There is no recorded case of an individual being "stuck" in hypnosis. There is a deep state of hypnosis however in which people feel so relaxed and claim that they do not want to come out of hypnosis but there are methods to emerge a person from this state. If you are in hypnosis and the hypnotist stopped talking, your own mind would pull you safely out of hypnosis in a couple of ways. You would either realize the hypnotist was no longer talking to you and gradually emerge from hypnosis on your own. When you open your eyes you would be completely wide awake, refreshed and feeling fine. The other possibility is that you would drift into a brief nap and then wake up normally, completely wide awake, feeling refreshed and alert. In either case a client can always come out of a hypnotic state on their own. If an emergency, such as a fire or an earthquake, occurs while you are in hypnosis, you will automatically recognize the urgency of the situation and immediately awake to full alertness.

**Myth:** You reveal your deepest secrets in hypnosis.

**Debunked:** This would suggest some element of a loss of control and many are profoundly uncomfortable by the thought they might reveal some sort of embarrassing information about themselves. It suggests that the therapist has an all-encompassing power to rummage around in your mind and find out all sorts of stuff you'd really rather he or she didn't know about you. In reality, you offer no more information to the hypnotist than you are completely comfortable with. A hypnotist cannot make you "tell-all". Obviously the more information you offer connected with the issue for which you are seeing the therapist the better and this information is always treated with the strictest confidentiality. But if you don't want to tell, you won't!

**Myth:** If you could hear the hypnotist during the session, then you were not hypnotized.

**Debunked:** This myth originates from another common misconception that being in a state of hypnosis is the same as being asleep. Many people feel that if they are in hypnosis, they will not be aware of anything around them, overlooking the obvious fallacy in this belief. If you are unaware of your surroundings, you will not be able to hear the voice of the hypnotist and so would not be able to follow any instructions. The truth about hypnosis is that you are relaxed but highly aware during hypnosis. You hear every word that is uttered. However, after the session, you may find that you may only have a partial memory of what you heard while in hypnosis. This amnesia is common because your mind was so focused on relaxing your body that it registered the hypnotist's words but did not store them in the conscious mind.

**Myth:** A hypnotist cured me in one session!

**Debunked:** Some of the most outrageous claims are made about hypnotism (although usually not by hypnotherapists themselves). These have their origins in stage hypnotism as well as hucksters of all types. Of course people regularly repeat claims that they were cured in only one session of hypnotherapy because it's such a good story. Who wants to hear about how it took you a decade, three divorces and 19,423 nicotine patches to give up smoking? *The truth is that almost no one is cured in one session, if they are cured at all through hypnosis.* Hypnotherapists usually insist that patients commit to 6 sessions, or sometimes 20 sessions. This isn't naked profiteering, change takes time. Even then, hypnotherapy is often used as an added extra to some other kind of treatment, rather than as the main method.

**Myth:** Hypnosis is a "Miracle Cure."

**Debunked:** While Hypnosis is a relatively quick method of making permanent improvements, there is no such thing as a one-time "Hypno-Miracle"! Every individual makes progress at his or her own rate. Be wary of those who make wild claims of overnight success.

**Myth:** All hypnosis is “playing pretend.”

**Debunked:** During stage hypnosis, participants are well aware that they are not actually a chicken or that they are not actually in the movies. They know they are acting (it just so happens hypnosis can make people into good actors). But not all hypnosis can be considered “playing pretend.” It depends on the nature of the suggestions given. If a suggestion is to “cluck like a chicken” then the patient will act it out. If the suggestion is “think of a time in your past where you felt really confident” – that is not playing pretend – the patient really is thinking about it and *associating* themselves into that time where they were really confident. I agree with hypnotists who believe that all hypnosis is self-hypnosis. This means that a hypnotist cannot typically trick someone into doing something against their own will. There is always compliance on both sides of the interaction. The only difference is hypnotists can evoke unusual or non-ordinary behaviors if they discover the right mode of communication.

**Myth:** Scientific studies claim that only 5% of the population is suggestible to hypnosis.

**Debunked:** This is partly true: scientific studies do often claim that only 5-10% of the population is suggestible to hypnosis. But these studies are largely flawed because researchers only test participants with common hypnotic inductions and generic hypnosis scripts. Hypnosis doesn’t work in a one-size-fits-all kind of way though (because its effectiveness comes from the use of our own personal and unique associations and understanding of language)... A good hypnotist has the ability to read his patient, stray away from generic scripts, and discover the language most suggestible to that particular patient. There are even techniques in NLP (Neurolinguistic Programming –a practice that could be considered “modern day hypnosis”) that allows NLP practitioners to discover a person’s language tendencies (sometimes referred to as “trance words” or “key words”) simply by asking the patient a series of questions. In other words, with the right hypnotist and the right communication – *anyone is suggestible to hypnosis*.

**Myth:** Only weak minds (and not strong minds) can be hypnotized.

**Debunked:** This belief results from confusing "being hypnotized" with being gullible or having no will power. Actually, the opposite is true. The higher your intelligence and the stronger your self-control, the *more easily you are hypnotized*. In general, people of above average intelligence and creativity who can concentrate well are the best candidates for hypnosis as they go into hypnosis easier and deeper than others. In fact, people of diminished mental capacity with a below average I.Q. who cannot concentrate, and people with certain serious neurological conditions cannot be hypnotized. After the first session most clients have a direct experiential understanding of the benefits of hypnosis. This understanding helps them, in subsequent session to enter faster and more deeply into the hypnotic state.

**Myth:** Hypnosis is similar to meditation.

**Debunked:** This is a common misunderstanding. Again – hypnosis is a set of communication techniques, while meditation is a more specific practice that is more linked with one’s state of awareness or mindfulness. One can however use hypnosis techniques to aid a meditative practice. What is often called “Guided Meditation” could be considered a form of hypnosis, and one could also use a degree of self-hypnosis (meaning no third party guidance) to expand or contract awareness into a particular meditative state. But again, hypnosis is not about a person’s mental state – it is about an expression of ideas or suggestions. At times, a particular mental state can be more conducive to learning. That is why often hypnotherapists choose to put their patients into a relaxed state before getting into the bulk of their session. People that are relaxed commonly feel more refreshed, can concentrate more, improve their cognitive abilities, and therefore are faster learners. “Stage hypnotists” don’t put want to put their participants into relaxed states, however. That would be a boring show. Instead, they usually want to instill some excitement or a sense of adventure – similar to the mood a child would be in.

**Myth:** You can’t lie under hypnosis.

**Debunked:** Oh yes you can! *Hypnosis is not some kind of magical state in which you can only speak the truth.* This is a natural result of the fact that you are not helpless when hypnotized and your usual moral (and immoral) faculties are still active. Not only can you lie under hypnosis, but lying is not necessarily any more detectable when hypnotized than when not (Sheehan & Statham, 1988).

**Myth:** Hypnosis deals with the occult and is the “Devil's work.”

**Debunked:** The belief that hypnosis is the "Devil's work" has unfortunately been created and strengthened by prevailing urban legends and by “B grade” Hollywood horror cult films. Most religions have accepted the fact that hypnosis can bring about long lasting, tangible healing benefits to an individual. The Roman Catholic Church was among the first to accept and recognize hypnosis as a healing procedure, way back in 1957. Most other major religions have also accepted hypnosis and do not prohibit their members from seeking and utilizing hypnosis. Hypnosis is a natural state that has been studied scientifically. Hypnotherapists are not Psychics or Palm Readers with "special powers". Hypnotherapy is based on many years of clinical research by famous Psychologists such as Dr. Sigmund Freud and Dr. Carl Jung, and more recently and by Dr. Milton Erikson.

**Myth:** Hypnosis is not a legitimate therapy.

**Debunked:** Hypnotherapy is coded as a profession by the U.S. Department of Labor, with “Hypnotherapist” listed as code number 079.157.010 in the Federal Government Titles of Legitimate Occupations.

**Myth:** Self-Hypnosis is safer, better, or more effective than going to a trained professional.

**Debunked:** Self-Hypnosis can be detrimental when not taught by a trained professional, as a negative attitude or belief about oneself will be reinforced regardless of suggestions given. This can cause more stress and problems in the long run. Hypnotherapy directly accesses the subconscious mind, while Self-Hypnosis cannot.

**Myth:** Hypnosis is not a real catalyst for physical or chemical changes in the body.

**Debunked:** Hypnosis cannot make your body do something it isn't already capable of doing naturally on its own. But hypnosis has been proven to help guide the body through certain changes through the use of suggestion for both behavioral changes (such as eating less, motivation to go to the gym) and even direct changes in the body (changes in metabolism, time it takes muscles to repair).

**Myth:** Hypnosis may be bad for your health.

**Debunked:** Far from being dangerous, hypnosis is very good for you, mentally and physically. Consider what happens to you when you are in hypnosis. Your body is so deeply relaxed that you do not need to pay attention to any part. It almost feels as if you have lost all connection to your body. Your mind is now free, perhaps for the first time, to forget about the stresses and strains of daily life. All you have to do is listen as the hypnotist describes your dreams and goals for the future in such vivid detail that you actually feel and experience this future as a reality. While you are in this state, you experience total calm and peace, and the feeling that your world is perfect. You are in total control of your destiny and you are happy, confident and fulfilled. When you are in this relaxed state, your brain releases an abundance of endorphins into your blood stream, and these pleasure hormones get transported to every cell in your body. You feel better than you have ever felt in your life. That is why when you end a session you feel so good you wake up smiling. All doctors, and the AMA (American Medical Association) in particular, are in agreement that relaxation has health benefits and is good for you.

**In 1955, the British Medical Association approved hypnosis as valid medical treatment.**

**In 1957 the Roman Catholic Church approved hypnosis as an option for therapy.**

**In 1958 the American Medical Association approved hypnosis as a valid therapy.**

**Myth:** Hypnosis is a state of consciousness.

**Debunked:** Hypnosis is not at all related to any particular state of consciousness. The reason people confuse hypnosis as a state of consciousness is because we often associate the techniques of hypnosis as leading to a half-sleep and half-awake state. We picture patients lying on leather sofas with their eyes closed and their awareness facing inwards to their “subconscious.” But the fact of the matter is hypnosis can be used to expand awareness just as effectively as it can be used to contract awareness. A perfect example of hypnosis operating at “normal” consciousness is stage hypnosis. When a participant clucks like a chicken, or acts out a scene in Saving Private Ryan – it is not that the individual is unconscious and being pulled by his or her strings like a stuffed puppet – they are just in a situation where they are comfortable acting out behaviors they normally wouldn’t do in front of a crowd. They are not being “controlled” by the hypnotist – they are just being communicated to very effectively. The participant’s free will is still in-tact throughout the whole session. A participant can bring his or her self out of hypnosis whenever they choose, but why would they when they are having so much fun playing pretend?

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