



**STAND**

# Information Centre

## 'HYPNOSIS & DEPRESSION'

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Depression is a serious and ever increasing psychological problem. It is estimated that approximately 20 million Americans are suffering from depression and this figure is on the increase. Beyond America, the rate of depression is significantly increasing worldwide as well.

A person suffering from depression can impact the lives of many others, by affecting family and friends, demonstrating how, at some point in our lives, we all will be affected by the disorder either directly or indirectly.

*The following article aims to educate the reader on the nature of depression and its treatment, and to review how clinical hypnosis as a therapeutic tool can help to alleviate the symptoms of depression and teach the skills known to reduce and even prevent depression.*

### Key facts about depression

- No single cause can be held accountable for the onset of depression. Contributing factors originate in three key areas, namely biological, psychological, and social, collectively known as the bio-psychosocial model.
- Depression is associated with a variety of medical conditions known to exacerbate symptoms, such as, cancer or heart disease. Psychological conditions such as anxiety disorders or drug addictions often co-exist with the disorder.
- Depression can be successfully treated through drug treatment or psychological therapies. However, no single anti-depressant has been found to produce fully comprehensive and robust results.
- Nevertheless, the application of anti-depressant treatment has been found to generate effective remission of symptoms including the efficient targeting of poor sleep and appetite.
- However, medications have some flaws, such as negative side-effects, dependency and tolerance.
- Psychological treatment, like medical treatment, has advantages and disadvantages. Cognitive, behavioural, and person-centred models are considered as a strong and productive treatment measure and have yielded many positive treatment outcomes and empirical support.
- The advantages lie in a strong educational component, the therapeutic relationship as a foundation for building and strengthening a client's sense of empowerment, constructive skills, and reducing rates of relapse.
- The disadvantages of psychotherapies include possible dependency on the therapist inhibiting personal growth and development, and a clinical theoretical bias that serves to confound rather than clarify issues.

### Examples of depressive symptoms

- An initial symptom is the persistent and long term loss of pleasure and interest from activities which the individual used to enjoy.
- Poor appetite and sleep, tiredness, irritation, low mood, low self worth, guilt, poor concentration, and thoughts of self-harm often accompany the disorder.
- A large study examining depression across a range of cultures found the most common symptom of depression to be insomnia.

It would be useful to use hypnosis as a measure to reduce symptoms of insomnia, as insomnia is known as both a symptom and a risk factor. A link between insomnia and subsequent relapses is present, thus insomnia is an important target.

A number of helpful suggestions for the treatment of depression have been suggested to clinicians by the Agency for Healthcare Quality and Research (AHQR):

- Three main models of therapy: cognitive, behavioural, and interpersonal, have gained strong empirical support. These can be applied according to the patient's symptom profile (*not* the therapist's preferred choice).
- Psychological treatment should facilitate a collaborative therapeutic relationship of an educating and supportive nature. Homework tasks and social skills training promote an ongoing positive change.
- Therapy does not necessarily have to focus on past histories or past perceived hurts; instead, the emphasis is on present concerns and difficulties, teaching effective skills in problem-solving whilst creating and meeting goals, and directing attention to coping skills and managing difficulties – it focuses on developing solutions to problems and coping skills for managing symptoms.

*Support for hypnosis as a treatment for depression*

Hypnosis is amenable to the therapies mentioned above, as it is also an active and directive means of intervention. The body of literature on hypnosis as a treatment option for depression is growing. However, therapeutic efficacy research involving hypnosis for depression has been non-existent – the main reason being that practitioners of hypnosis do not carry out research, and clinical researchers have generally focused on evaluating specific forms of therapy, and not therapeutic adjuncts, such as hypnosis.

However, the therapeutic qualities of hypnosis have been evaluated scientifically in a number of relevant arenas. In short,

- there is growing empirical support for the use of hypnosis. Research suggests that hypnosis is a measure linked to positive changes in depressive patients, encouraging a sense of personal empowerment whilst combating depressive symptoms, and
- hypnosis is also shown to be useful in treating pain, anxiety, and numerous other physical and psychological problems often associated with depression.

One of the strongest factors contributing to hypnosis is the patient's expectancy of therapeutic outcomes. Positive expectancy, or positive belief, leads patients to believe that the procedure implemented by the therapist will produce a desired therapeutic result. Positive expectancies involve many perceptions, e.g. the clinician is seen as credible, the procedure seems to have a plausible rationale, etc. Thus, by educating patients on hypnosis, expectations are established that the associated procedures will have a potentially therapeutic benefit, increasing the likelihood of them actually doing so.

*Similarities between hypnosis and psychotherapy*

There is ample evidence that psychotherapy for the treatment of depression can be highly effective, and often, clinical hypnosis can be used as an adjunct to the therapy.

- Both hypnosis and psychotherapy have common underlying themes of education and empowerment, which appear in both types of treatment.
- Strong themes of change and increased personal choice, which emerge in treatment are inherent in the process of communication and influence the overall impact of therapy.
- Hypnosis favours the belief that people are capable of being more autonomous and competent, function at a higher level when better connected to their many skills, some which are consciously recognised and some that are unconscious and thus go unnoticed and, hence, un-used. Hypnosis can make certain abilities both more well-defined and readily accessible.

Hypnosis is an effective tool for teaching numerous beneficial skills which do not create a dependence on medications, such as effective coping skills, problem-solving skills, social skills, behavioural skills, and even basic relaxation skills which can help alleviate sleep disturbance. These are all skills that are well established as essential to recovery from depression.

### Conclusion

Empirical evidence supports the teaching of various skills to depressed patients, such as an awareness of and means to self-correct irrational ways of thinking, known as cognitive distortions. It also advocates implementing positive behaviours, which may also encourage positive interactions and reduce the social isolation often found in depressed individuals. The underlying theme appears to indicate an empowered individual who has learnt and adopted new and positive skills that represent a positive change.

- Reinforcing and augmenting a patient's personal resources through numerous skills such as, relaxation, define the successful application of clinical hypnosis.
- A sense of autonomy can serve as a strong determining factor, which helps reduce the symptoms of this debilitating and widespread disorder.

### References

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*Research findings indicate that hypnosis has benefits  
in promoting empowerment within various patient groups.*