

WELLNESS

Natural Fixes

Hypnosis for Kicking the Smoking Habit

Q&A BY ASHLEY BREEDING

What is hypnosis, and how can it help someone stop smoking?

NOAH KASS: During hypnosis, a therapist uses mental imagery and suggestion to elicit positive change in the client's feelings, thoughts, and behaviors. He or she will guide you to a relaxed and focused state where you're responsive to suggestions and able to visualize goals. Those who successfully quit smoking learn to recognize the underlying reasons why they smoke and replace cigarettes with a healthier behavior.

OK, what exactly happens during a session?

KASS: Hypnosis typically takes place in a traditional psychotherapy office. The therapist asks questions to understand your smoking history and what's held you back from quitting. As hypnosis begins, music is played to guide you

into a relaxed state. You'll close your eyes, focus on deepening your breath, and relax your muscles. The therapist will then create imagery in the form of a personal metaphor, story, or analogy that relates to your life. Personalized imagery makes you more open to change and lets you build an aversion to smoking and create rewards for not smoking.

How many sessions does it take?

KASS: For smoking, generally just one. If smokers are told that treatment requires additional sessions, it indirectly gives them permission to keep smoking until the last one is completed. The deadline creates an urgency to stop. However, when clients stop smoking cigarettes, issues such as depression and anxiety can surface. It takes significantly longer to resolve

THE EXPERT:

Noah Kass, D.S.W., L.C.S.W., a psychotherapist and clinical director at NY Health Hypnosis and Integrative Therapy in New York City



All right, what makes someone a good candidate for hypnosis?

KASS: Are you generally able to relax and let your mind wander? Research shows that hypnotizability is often related to creativity and exploration. Individuals who are able to lose themselves in a book or movie are also often able

those deeper issues, which may require additional therapy techniques.

So that's it—one visit and you're off cigarettes?

KASS: Many clients stop smoking right after their initial hypnosis. Others decrease their smoking over the next few days and then quit altogether. But they have to proactively reduce stress and surround themselves with people aligned with their goal. I also encourage revisualization of imagery from their hypnosis session as well as repetition of a personal mantra they discover through our work together. This will help separate smoking from common triggers such as having a cigarette with a cup of coffee. In fact, it will seem strange to do so after treatment.

OXYGEN/GETTY IMAGES.

to achieve a hypnotic state more readily.

Is hypnosis as effective as conventional nicotine-replacement therapies?

KASS: Several studies demonstrate the effectiveness of hypnosis over the patch, gum, and other nicotine-replacement treatments. The rates of relapse were also significantly lower. Hypnosis helps you summon the strength to withstand withdrawal after quitting. And when carried out by a licensed mental health professional in a caring and respectful manner, hypnosis doesn't have any negative side effects. I would look for a therapist who is licensed by the state as a social worker, mental health counselor, or psychologist and who has had training in Ericksonian hypnosis.

