

Hypnosis for well-being benefits both mind and body

You are getting sleepy ... very sleepy. This Hollywood hypnosis cliché — complete with a swaying pocketwatch dangling in front of a paralyzed rube — couldn't be further from the truth. Asheville-area practitioners say facilitating well-being through hypnosis is a very real way to deal with emotional and even physical pain.

Michelle Payton, founder of the 750-member Asheville Area Wholistic and Integrative Professionals, says the mind is extremely powerful, and its powers over the body, seemingly limitless, are just beginning to be unlocked.

Clients contact her for everything from night terrors to balance issues to chronic pain. She says people should seek well-being through hypnosis after seeking traditional avenues.

"I've had clients with recurring issues. They've had MRIs, blood tests, hormone tests, X-rays," says Payton. "The doctors say there is nothing wrong, but the client still knows something is wrong. ... Obviously if it's something physiological, no, we can't fix broken legs, but the only other thing to say now is, what behavior needs to be replaced?"



MIND POWER: "Hypnosis for well-being is like a guided meditation. If the person's not acting on it, it won't work," says practitioner Dawn Westmoreland. Photos by Pat Barcas



OPENING THE WAY:

Hypnosis gives clients "a chance to reuse a pathway in the brain that was good, and it starts to open other healthy pathways," says Michelle Payton, right. Cheryl Sullivan, left, adds that hypnosis can "remove the roadblocks in your mind" to let healing occur.

Photo by Pat Barcas

Payton's approach involves reminding ailing clients, who are always willing and in control, that they've felt well before. About 80 percent of the typical one- to two-hour session goes toward recalling memories of when the client was perfectly healthy. Hypnosis, she says, brings them back to a previous place in their mind where all was well, and avenues in the brain are then re-opened.

"Where on the body are you feeling it? If it's a place that feels not 100 percent of where you want it to feel, you replace that with what you want to feel," says Payton. "What we've done is given you a chance to reuse a pathway in the brain that was good, and it starts to open other healthy pathways."

This type of wellness treatment can work where traditional medicine has failed. The idea is that the mind, overstressed, is blocking traditional healing from taking place. Hypnosis opens the mind and allows physical healing to take place.

Dawn Westmoreland, retired after 20 years in the Air Force, got certified in hypnotherapy about

four years ago. She now works in Asheville as a life coach and well-being facilitator through hypnosis, and she has many clients come to her for stress relief. It's important for there to be trust during a client visit for maximum effectiveness, she says.

"You don't just sit them in the chair and hypnotize them. You really are doing coaching in a sense, getting to the root of their problem, finding out what is causing this stress," she says.

Myths and mysteries about hypnosis do continue to propagate. Westmoreland says dispelling these is an action she performs willingly as part of her job.

Stage hypnosis, or Hollywood's portrayal of hypnosis, is for entertainment only, typically guided by very talented male performers who carefully pick people from the audience, she says. Wellness practitioners say stage hypnosis is real but has no basis in healing.

"Hypnosis for well-being is like a guided meditation. If the person's not acting on it, it won't work. You have to be a willing participant. It's not a magic pill," says Westmoreland. "Years ago, hypnotists were marketing themselves, saying they could

control your mind. That was the worst thing they could do. People come here with misconceptions that I can get in their mind and make them do things they don't want to do. That's simply not true."

It boils down to mind over matter — suggestions that will benefit a person, she says.

"It's good energy. You're working with powerful suggestions. I like to let clients come up with the benefits — what are the suggestions they want?" Westmoreland says. "If I tell someone they're going to rob a bank when they wake up, no, they're a moral person, that's not going to work. Hypnosis just doesn't work that way. They may wake up and come over and sock me."

The positive suggestions she drops can range from stopping smoking to weight loss, all with the added benefit of deep relaxation. After a hypnosis session, practitioners say it's like coming out of a very deep nap.

Other well-being sessions incorporate not thinking about a

time of wellness, but a time that may have caused a client's current state of illness.

Cheryl Sullivan got hooked on the feeling of being hypnotized and has since founded the Inception Point Institute in Asheville. Her wellness facilitation works through past life regression — recalling the root cause or origin of pain and suffering in one's life, or even a past life. These deep-hypnosis sessions can have clients transcending time and recalling pain they experienced even while in the womb.

"I've had a client tell me they were in psychotherapy for 20 years, and they told me this worked better in one hour," she says.

Sullivan cautions, however, that while this type of healing is very powerful, it does not take the place of the medical community.

"The doctor might give you a pill, and it might not work. What I can do is remove the roadblocks in your mind so traditional healing can be let through. It's very powerful, and the changes are lasting." ❧