



AUTOIMMUNE CONDITIONS AND HYPNOTHERAPY

Study 1: Hypnosis Helps Autoimmune Disorders – Five Case Studies

Mind-Body Hypnotic Imagery in the Treatment of Autoimmune Disorders

http://www.redorbit.com/news/health/1174128/mindbody_hypnotic_imagery_in_the_treatment_of_autoimmune_disorders/

RESULTS: The author describes five cases where hypnosis was successfully used to help people suffering from autoimmune disorders.

Case One – Multiple Sclerosis

This client had a remitting/relapsing form of multiple sclerosis. She loved the sensation of cold water on her skin and chose the imagery of immersing her body in the cold water of a inland lake formed by the melting snows of surrounding mountains.

Following the immersion in the cool and pure waters of the lake, she experienced herself (in the imagery) in a spa whereby she was receiving a healing and invigorating massage. Following the massage, she fell asleep and woke up feeling rejuvenated and much better. She practiced this exercise with self-hypnosis at home. It was suggested to re-label her immune system from being too aggressive to being confused and misguided. She liked that idea and set the goal of helping her immune system to learn how to tell the difference between cells and tissues that were part of her own body and those that were representing foreign pathogenic invaders (bacteria, viruses, fungi, etc.) Imagery was used whereby all the cells and tissues in her body were tagged with the letters J. P. (the client's initials), which meant that they were safe from being attacked by her immune system and that they were part of the organism in which the immune system resides.

Only those organisms that were not tagged were fair game. In addition, she also learned to communicate with her own immune system cells letting them know they are part of a larger organism that is made up of many cells and tissues designed to keep the organism alive and in good health. J. P. was asked to write down the following phrase: "All for one and one for all, united we stand together in peaceful co-existence with respect and dignity for the sake of the whole". She was asked to repeat it in her own mind in a state of formal hypnosis and also when she was out of

formal hypnosis. Several months later, she reported continuing to stay in a remission, functioning well at home and at work.

Case Two – Rheumatoid Arthritis

R. J. was a 25 year-old single woman who had been diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis as a teenager. By the age of 25, she already had several relapses followed by spontaneous remissions. She learned to use self-hypnosis quickly and effectively focusing on the ocean beach scene imagery to achieve a state of calmness and activate me relaxation response. She loved to swim and went into detail describing her skills of floating in the waters of the ocean and swimming pool. She then described how much she enjoyed her brief sessions in the whirlpool right after a lap in the swimming pool of her gym. In hypnotic trance, she was asked to focus on the ocean beach scene imagery experiencing it with all five senses.

This was done using interactive imagery whereby she verbalized her experiences on the ocean beach of her choice. Future focused imagery was then used. The focus was not only in achieving the experience of returning to optimal functioning of her physical mobility and other activities, but also on gaining a new sense of healthy balance in her life on a mind-body-spirit continuum. She was then asked to internalize these experiences with members of her family and friends, integrating the experience with all five senses (visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, and gustatory) as well as internalizing feelings of joy, love and mastery, having achieved a healthy balance of activities in day-to-day living.

When she was guided out of the hypnotic state, she reported with a smile that she already felt better and that her joints felt more flexible, free and limber. She reported that she had to consciously think about the pain and focus on it to recognize if it was still present. Four weeks later, she came to the office for a follow up visit and stated with a smile on her face that she was now back in remission as pronounced by her rheumatologist. Her goal now was to stay in remission for “the rest of my life”.

She was instructed to continue and practice self-hypnosis with guided imagery focused on activating the relaxation response on a daily basis. Follow up visits at 3 months, 6 months and 9 months later found her in a stable healthy remission, continuing to practice self hypnosis and guided imagery.

Case Three – Polymyositis / Dermatomyositis

V. C. wanted to reduce the pain, improve his functioning and help him to achieve remission since he was in an acute relapse. He was able to easily and quickly apply the skill of self-hypnosis using guided imagery of the ocean beach scene experiencing it with all five senses, incorporating and integrating it with his meditation-prayer practice.

He expressed a strong desire to visit the Holy Land and specifically, immerse himself in the waters of the Jordan River as a way of renewing his overall health and faith on a mind-body-spirit dimension. It was decided to employ future focused guided imagery as a way of allowing him to experience and internalize his own prescription for healing and achieving a remission.

In a state of self-hypnotic trance and meditation and with the use of guided imagery suggestions on all five senses, he experienced himself traveling to the Holy Land and visiting the sea of Galilee and the Jordan River. He then described his experience of immersing himself in the cool clear waters of the Jordan River. He described how his skin felt cool and calm, how the red blotches of swelling disappeared and his skin looked clean and healthy. When he came out of the water, he recited a special prayer of gratitude for allowing him to heal from his acute illness. He reported feeling a jolt of energy and strength going through his whole body and was able to walk with vigor, feeling renewed and reinvigorated with a sense of purpose and enthusiasm, seeing himself giving a presentation in his church (after he returned to his community in the USA) regarding his experiences of healing during his trip to the Holy Land.

When he came out of his self-hypnotic trance, he reported feeling calm and relaxed. He was asked to write an essay about his experiences on his imaginary trip to the Holy Land and bring his written essay with him to the following session. A week later, as he read from the essay, he described his trip using the past tense implying that in his mind, this already happened. He also reported feeling an overall improvement in his physical health associated with a significant reduction of the skin rash and a decrease in his muscle and joint pain. Two months later, he reported with great satisfaction that he was pronounced by his rheumatologist to have achieved a full remission.

Case Four – Systemic Lupus Erythematosus

E. J. was suffering from a remitting-relapsing form of systemic lupus erythematosus (SLE). She requested help to reduce the acute symptoms of general muscle and joint pain, tiredness, and skin rash. She wanted to achieve a remission as soon as possible and learn to meditate on a regular basis so she could better effectively cope with the daily stresses in her life. She believed that stress in general was a factor in precipitating the acute relapse of her chronic disease – SLE.

She quickly learned the use of self-hypnosis utilizing the ocean beach scene and activating the relaxation response. She stated that she knew exactly how the lupus had happened and brought in drawings with her, illustrating her immune system attacking the connective tissues in her body. The aggressive immune system antibodies were drawn as wild dogs that had transformed into wolf like creatures. She described them as wild animals that have gone astray, they have lost their

discipline, they don't listen anymore to orders from the immune system headquarters. She also had in her drawings white horses that were described as gentle but powerful.

The horses represented the healthy side of her immune system. These horses had the ability to produce a powerful kick to any invading enemies in the form of bacteria or viruses but these horses would never hurt their own kind. They were able to identify what cells in the body were part of the self and should not be hurt, but rather protected. In a state of self-hypnotic trance, she said that she consulted with the chief horse about the situation and was told that the dog like aggressive creatures of the immune system were confused and actually unhealthy and that is why they were mistakenly attacking cells and tissues of the body. The alpha chief horse suggested a solution that would transform these wild dogs into healthy white horses and that the alpha horse knew exactly how this could be done. The suggestion was made to round up the herd of wild dogs into a special compound, at the end of the compound there was a gate which led to a river. The wild dogs would then be guided through the white rushing, cool waters of the river that ended up in a waterfall leading to an inland lake.

In the process of swimming through the river and coming down the waterfall into the lake, these wild dogs would be transformed into white horses as the alpha horse was leading them through the process. As she was describing this she suddenly opened her eyes, took out her drawing papers and sat on the floor drawing out this process. She was drawing with crayons using color to depict the process of how this was about to happen. She later stated that she did not do the drawings, it was the alpha white horse that did it all. When asked if she believed if one of her hands did the drawing and that hand is part of her body, she stated that "I know this logically, but it doesn't feel like I did it and I don't fully remember drawing it...the alpha white horse did it".

She was then instructed to go home and practice her self-hypnosis integrating guided imagery for healing and recovery. The following session she came in reporting that the alpha white horse did it, but it got help from its mate and they did it as a team. However, she believed that not all the "wild and confused aggressive dogs" of her immune system were rounded up in this first attempt. Some of them were still running around doing their damaging aggressive acts. She stated that she was convinced that additional round ups would be necessary to complete the transformation of all the confused, aggressive "wild dogs" into "white and powerful horses".

She reported some improvement in her overall health and a significant reduction in the redness on her skin. This was specifically noticeable on her face. A month later in a follow up visit, she reported the successful completion of the transformation of her immune system now knowing to identify the difference between cells and tissues of

her own body and those of invading pathogenic organisms (bacteria, viruses, fungi, etc.). This was accompanied by a significant improvement in her clinical state. Two months later, she was declared by her rheumatologist as having achieved a full remission.

Case Five – Autoimmune Pericarditis

M.G. had idiopathic pericarditis associated with chest pain and inflammation in the pericardial space with fluid accumulation that had to be aspirated. Since then she had two remissions and two relapses. About a year ago, she had additional laboratory tests and was told that her pericarditis was of autoimmune origin. Following a comprehensive interview and mental status examination, she communicated her desire to learn better ways to control stress, anxiety and worry in her life believing that they are responsible for precipitating her relapse symptoms.

She learned the use of self- hypnosis quickly and was instructed to practice at home focused on guided imagery using the ocean beach scene and internalizing it with all five senses. She was able to experience an immediate relief of her anxieties and a reduction in her chest pain from a self-rated scale of 8 to 2 (on a scale of 1 to 10). This later allowed her to reduce the medications prescribed for pain control (Tylenol with codeine). In addition, her heart rate was also reduced from an average of a resting 96 beats per minute to a resting 72 per minute.

In later sessions, she learned to internalize new images of healing her pericardium by changing (in imagery) the colors of inflammation from hot red to soft pink, which was associated in her mind with healthy normal tissues. In addition she also used imagery to reduce the inflammation in the pericardial space by visualizing the reduction of all the inflammation fluids. In later sessions, she learned how to “educate” her immune system to identify her body’s cells and tissues as “one of us” and therefore the immune system is to protect them and never attack them.

Eight weeks after the beginning of her treatment with hypnotic imagery she was examined by her cardiologist and told that she again entered a remission. Six months later she was examined in a follow up visit and declared that she continued to do well and had no relapse symptoms. Nine months after the beginning of her treatment, she continued to be off prednisone and reported being free of pericarditis symptoms.

NOTES: The immune system is designed to, among other functions, identify and destroy foreign invading organisms. However, when the immune system identifies the antigens on our own cells as antigens of foreign agents such as bacteria, viruses, or fungi, the immune system attacks these cells in attempt to destroy them with the purpose of protecting the integrity of our own living organism.

The authors note that there are two types of T cells: T helper cells that help the B cells in producing antibodies that attack and destroy the invading pathogenic organisms (bacteria, viruses, fungi, etc.) and T suppressor cells that are designed to reign in the B cells and the T helper cells when they become too aggressive. It is postulated that one mechanism that operates in the development of autoimmune disorders involves an immune system that has lost its natural balance either by weakening of the T suppressor cells response or by an overproduction of B cells and T helper cells, which may be involved in producing antibodies that mistakenly attack the organism's own cells and tissues, failing to identify them as part of its own self organism. When the immune system is confused, individuals are predisposed to autoimmune disorders.

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Study 2: Alopecia Areata (an auto-immune disease that leads to loss of scalp hairs) and Hypnosis

Hypnotic Approaches for Alopecia Areata

http://bscw.rediris.es/pub/bscw.cgi/d4448242/Willemsen-Hypnotic_approaches_alopecia_areata.pdf

RESULTS: Twelve out of 21 patients treated with hypnosis, including 4 with total loss of scalp hair, presented a significant hair growth. All patients presented a significant decrease in scores for anxiety and depression. Although the exact mechanism of hypnotic interventions has not been elucidated, the authors' results demonstrate that hypnotic interventions may ameliorate the clinical outcome of patients with Alopecia Areata (AA) and may improve their psychological well-being.

NOTES: Alopecia Areata (AA) is an autoimmune disease leading to loss of scalp hairs. The disease seems triggered by stress. Twenty-eight patients with extensive AA, all resistant to previous conventional treatment, were treated with hypnosis at the Academic Hospital UZ Brussel, Brussels, Belgium. This paper describes in detail the authors' hypnotherapeutic approach combining symptom-oriented suggestions with suggestions to improve self-esteem.

Hypnotic sessions were held every 2 or 3 weeks. All patients were asked to practice their self-hypnosis exercises at least twice a week. Hypnosis was introduced with suggestions of relaxation. After this hypnotic induction, patients were invited to imagine a place

where they felt safe and secure. The following types of hypnotic suggestions were given. First, participants were offered a possible explanation of the origin of the AA.

It was explained to them that in AA the affected hair follicles are mistakenly attacked by lymphocytes of their own immune system, resulting in an arrest of the hair growth. In a second step, different kinds of symptom-oriented suggestions were proposed for correcting this immune deviation. Patients received suggestions to imagine the healing effects of the sun on the skin of the scalp. They were asked to feel the rise in scalp temperature leading to vasodilation of all blood vessels. A suggestion was given that fresh blood would flow to all hair follicles leading to a reduction of inflammation around the hair follicles. Participants were told that the land must be free from weeds before new plants can grow. New plants need water and sunlight. For this, patients were invited to imagine a garden and to garden in it. Suggestions were given to choose a big old tree and to imagine putting their arms around it and feeling its strength. It was suggested that patients imagine becoming a part of this tree and see or feel how their roots enter deeply in the ground to absorb everything that they need to grow as firmly and as big as the tree. They were invited to explore those ingredients in the ground that could help them (vitamins, minerals, water, but also self-acceptance, self-confidence) to develop such beautiful leaves as those in the big old tree.

Patients were encouraged to find an additional personal metaphorical or symbolic image of their growing hairs. Patients were invited to explore all possible resources within their inner minds that could help them to heal their bodies. Next, the patients were asked to visualize, to feel, or to hear this healing energy and to direct it to their scalp. Finally, they were invited to imagine that this healing energy was able to ameliorate the immune deviation. They were asked to imagine the healing energy working on the hair follicles while stimulating the hair growth.

It was suggested that patients direct healing energy to their own skin just by breathing in and out and by bringing loving kindness and acceptance to those regions of the skin that were inflamed and stressing them the most, such as their scalp. Many patients reported shame and embarrassment because of their hair loss. Some showed symptoms of social phobia or agoraphobic reactions (such as avoiding public places). In these patients, ego-strengthening suggestions were added to the symptom-oriented approach. They were asked to remember a past peak experience with regard to their self-esteem. Next, this feeling was used as an anchor. Patients were asked to imagine behaving with less shame to a specific stressful event or situation in the future.

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