



December 2007 Health Letter

The Value of Mind-Body Medicine

OK, Quick everyone. Hypnosis. What comes to mind? Watch the watch... walk like a duck now..., Right? You don't really believe that do you? Good. Because I have no interest in that sort of thing either. So what do I mean by "hypnotherapy?" And what could it be useful for in medical settings? Clinically, when used by licensed health professionals, hypnosis is a state of narrowed, focused attention in which a person is able to utilize the power of suggestion to alter states of the body and mind. The suggestion and the narrowed concentration both come from the patient, not the doctor, and whatever happens during hypnosis happens because the patient wants it to happen. The patient is not "under the control of" the doctor and could stop the session at any time at will. The doctor, when well trained, is simply like a coach on the sidelines of a basketball game: not playing the game, but essential to overseeing its outcome. When I practice this with kids, I call it "daydreaming on purpose" because all kids know a lot about daydreaming and do it well. We just want to take that natural energy and process and use it "on purpose" to affect a change in symptoms or health. But even adults daydream, right? Try this if you like: think back to Christmas as a child. Recall a specific day, a scene: who was there, what was said, what was the sunlight like that day, what furniture was in the room, what were the sounds, the voices, the smells of food, the tastes, the feelings you had at the time? Take a moment to close your eyes, take a deep breath, and re-live one of those moments. For a few moments, depending on how vivid your imagination, you tuned out the rest of the world and may not have heard what else was going on around you. That's really a brief form of self-hypnosis. In its expanded versions, I use the same practice of mental imagery and relaxation to help patients achieve their health goals. One area where this has great success is in chronic pain. Since 2002 I have been working with children and adults with a variety of chronic pain issues, and have had great success using hypnotherapy with many. Scientific medical literature supports the use of clinical hypnosis for a broad array of conditions: according to the NIH (NCCAM) and other published research, mind-body interactions exist for immunity, wound healing, blood pressure, quicker recovery from surgery, and pain control such as migraine headaches. And the beauty of the practice includes no nasty drug side effects or interactions. And once you learn it well, you can practice at home any time you like, for free! So this Christmas, take a few moments in the middle of a busy day, take a deep breath, let your eyes gently close, and daydream on purpose. It's a great gift to give yourself. For an evaluation to see when a more in-depth approach would be right for your health concerns, give me a call at 803-426-1421. I'll be glad to help.

For health and healing,

Robert Pendergrast, MD

p.s.: there are still a few places open in the "Eight Weeks to Optimum Health" class starting on January 6th. Call the office at 803-426-1421 for details. And we'll be at the Magnolia Natural Market in Aiken on January 10 at 7:00 p.m., talking about "The Anti-inflammatory Diet." There will be a food tasting alongside the talk! Hope to see you there.