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Hypnotism 'speeds up cancer op recovery and cuts chance of it returning'

By [Fiona Macrae](#)

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Mesmerising: Women undergoing breast cancer operations under hypnosis recovered more quickly

Hypnotising women undergoing breast cancer surgery could speed their recovery and reduce the odds of the disease returning, experts believe.

They say using a combination of hypnotism and local anaesthetic to put patients under also allows quicker discharge from hospital and leaves patients more satisfied overall.

However, the technique is recommended only for operations in which surgeons do not tug at flesh and patients must be 'motivated'.

The recommendations come from Belgian anaesthetists who already routinely put patients having breast and thyroid operations in pain-relieving trances.

To prove the technique's worth, they carried out studies on two groups of patients.

The first involved 78 breast cancer patients, scheduled for ops which included removing part of the breast.

Eighteen of the women had the hypnosis, combined with a local anaesthetic, which only numbed the chest area. The others had a general anaesthetic that knocked them out completely.

Those that were hypnotised spent five or six minutes more under the surgeon's knife but needed fewer powerful pain-relieving drugs when recovering afterwards.

They were also discharged nearly a day earlier, on average, the European Anaesthesiology Congress heard.

There may be another important benefit to cancer patients.

Professor Fabienne Roelants, of the Universite Catholique de Louvain, or UCL, in Brussels, said: 'In addition to reducing drug use and hospital stay time, being able to avoid general anaesthesia in breast cancer surgery is important because we know that local anaesthesia can block the body's stress response to surgery and therefore reduce the possible spread (of the tumour).'

In the second study, 54 patients had part, or all, of their thyroid gland removed.

Once more, 18 underwent the gentler option of hypnosis and a local anaesthetic.

Their operations took about 20 minutes longer but recovery was quicker and the amount of time spent in hospital was shorter.

Professor Roelants said: 'There is still a lot of debate around the exact mechanism that allows hypnosis to reduce pain perception, but what is absolutely clear is that it does so.

'The result is that one third of thyroidectomies and a quarter of all breast cancer surgery carried out at the UCL hospital are performed under local anaesthetic with the patient under hypnosis.'



In a trance: Those that were hypnotised spent five or six minutes more under the surgeon's knife but needed fewer powerful pain-relieving drugs when recovering afterwards

The conference heard that for hypnosis to work, the patients have to be motivated, ready to co-operate and trust their doctors.

It could also be used on some knee, hernia, eye, ear, nose and throat ops, as well as in plastic surgery and when removing a woman's eggs ahead of IVF treatment.

Study co-author Dr Christine Watremez, said: 'Although there are special precautions to be taken - for example, only the hypnotherapist should talk to the patient during the procedure and should avoid negatives, which unconsciousness cannot handle, and the surgeon needs to be gentle, avoid any tugging in his movements, and be able to remain cool in all circumstances - it is a straight forward procedure and appreciated by the patients.

'To date there are few publications about the use of hypnosis in surgery, and we hope that, by contributing to the body of evidence on its efficacy, our research will encourage others to carry out this procedure to the advantage of all concerned.'

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As a Clinical Hypnotherapist of many years standing, it has been my privilege to work with many people suffering with terminal illnesses, including cancer. I have helped with pre- and post-operative healing, pain management, and positive visualisations to name but a few. But it has been so frustrating having to deal with the NHS - and the medical profession in general, I'm sad to say. When I helped a trainee anaesthetist with exam nerves, I told him that patients under anaesthetic can still hear what is being said around them and take it in, so all the operating theatre staff should be upbeat and positive (even if the prognosis is poor). I would love to know if he ever acted on that information.

- Penny Samuels, Plymouth, Devon, 14/6/2011 12:24

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For many years now people like myself who have trained to use Clinical Hypnotherapy have been telling doctors to be careful about what we call negative prognosis around anyone undergoing an operation. Because we know there is part of the mind that never sleeps, is never totally oblivious to its surroundings and it can report what went on, whilst in the unconscious state. Of course as opposed to medication there are no side effects from hypnosis and study after study shows it does facilitate healing. The use of this powerful therapy is long overdue and every hospital in the country should be making this form of treatment available to the people.

- Tim J, London UK, 14/6/2011 11:44

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As I am allergic to most forms of medication and in need of an operation (large endo tumour on ovary) this would be great if the NHS would only consider it. I can't have my operation until it becomes life threatening as I may die from a reaction on the table anyway, why are the medical profession in this country so backwards thinking? If it works, use it.

- m.b, herts, 14/6/2011 11:21

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People Have been curing cancer for years with harmless herbal remedies including terminal cancer, see for yourself. Youtube, (the forbidden cancer cures) and how to make them. Cancer is big business.

- CJ, Ireland, 14/6/2011 10:22

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This follows the news from the Royal Society of Medicine last week for the potential to save the NHS £millions by using properly trained and registered practitioners. There are however still many myths about hypnosis (arguably supported by ill-chosen photos DM!- I agree Glenn Alexander) and along with inappropriately trained individuals and the damage they cause there needs to be some more work to properly align the legitimate practise with, and under, clinical guidance- but it does happen and is possible with significant benefits to be acheived. It is against the code of conduct of the British Society for Clinical Hypnosis for registered practitioners to perform stage shows (entertainment really). Another challenge is the subjective nature of the process and the experience which does not lend itself well to large scale randomised clinical trials but fortunately this is now getting addressed with studies such as reported.

- Stuart, Kirkwall, Orkney, 14/6/2011 09:24

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I went on a self hypnosis course and it was fantastic. Got rid of hayfever overnight, haven't had a cold in 18 years, wake up at whatever time I want to in the morning without aid of alarm clock, don't need will power to do anything, just zap myself. It's staggering how much your own brain controls. I've never spent another penny on it apart from the course, no drugs, no side effects. Very important - our teacher, master hypnotist told us never try to substitute proper medical treatment and to work with the doctors who are treating you, and prevention better than cure.

- zappiest, london, 14/6/2011 09:10

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