

HEALTH

Sleep Hypnosis—What It Is, How It Works and Who Can Benefit

BY SOO KIM ON 1/15/22 AT 7:00 AM EST



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Do you struggle with falling asleep at night? Well, you're not alone. More than a third of adults in the U.S. don't get enough sleep on a regular basis, according to a February 2016 report from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC).

Sleeping is vital for health across all ages. Not getting enough sleep can put you at increased risk for obesity, type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease and stroke, poor mental health and even early death, warns the CDC.

There are a variety of foods, medications and exercises that could potentially help you to sleep. But if you've not found success with these more traditional methods, perhaps sleep hypnosis could be an alternative for you.

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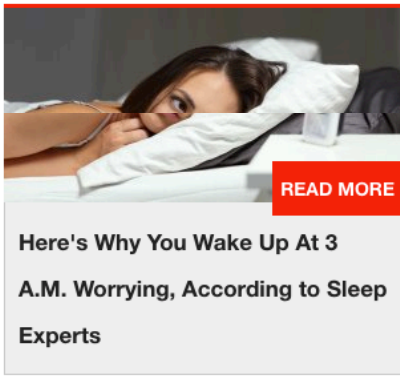
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Speaking to *Newsweek*, Jonathan Garside, a clinical U.K., explained: "You may not know it, but sleep and hypnosis are very closely related. Hypnosis occurs on the very edge of sleep, and it's at this point that the conscious and subconscious minds are in close communication.

"That's why a good sleep hypnotherapist can help you to get the sleep you deserve," he added.

According to the hypnotherapist, around 70 million people in the U.S. suffer from sleep disorders. Sleep is important as it keeps us healthy and functioning well and "lets your body and brain repair, restore, and re-energize."

Sleep is also a major factor in keeping our immune system strong, which is something we all need at the moment, Garside said, amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

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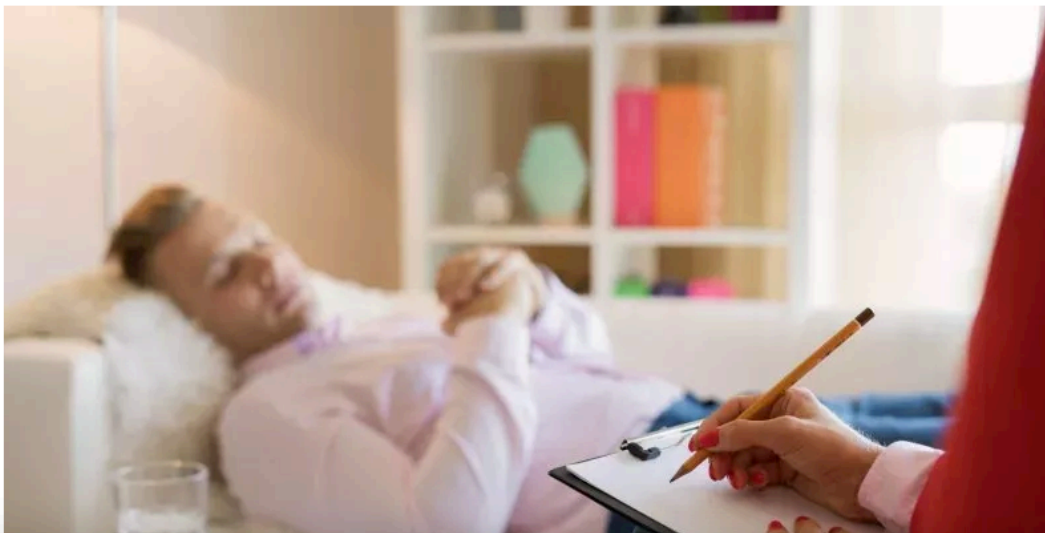
What Is Sleep Hypnosis?

Speaking to *Newsweek*, Dr. Lindsay Browning—a chartered psychologist and author of *Navigating Sleeplessness* who sees private clients at her sleep clinic *Troubling Sleeping*—explained sleep hypnosis is the use of hypnotherapy to "change unhelpful thoughts or habits that disrupt sleep."

The goal is not to fall asleep during the hypnosis session but rather to "heighten focus on one topic (that of sleep) during the session," she explained, "which will then hopefully lead to changes in your thoughts and actions following the session."

Sleep hypnosis can make it easier for someone to change their future sleep habits to become more aligned with good sleep hygiene, which is beneficial for sleep, Browning said.

The psychologist also noted sleep hypnosis can be used in conjunction with CBT-I (cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia), which is considered the "gold standard" treatment for insomnia.



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How Does Sleep Hypnosis Work?

In a basic sense, sleep hypnosis works by preparing your mind and body for sleep.

"When your mind is calm, your body is relaxed and you are confident in your safety and ability to sleep well, you're creating the perfect foundation for a great night's sleep," Garside said.

The hypnosis process helps you to leave behind the events of the day that's just ended and keep at bay any thoughts about the day ahead, placing you in the middle in "a bubble of protected sleep," he said.

A sleep hypnotherapist will guide you into "a pleasant, relaxed state and offer suggestions to your subconscious mind" about the rewards of having better quality sleep and help reset your sleep clock to give you better, more reliable sleep.

The hypnotherapist explained: "The problem with sleep is that no one really knows how to do it. It's not like learning a sport or language, where practice makes perfect, we just

go to bed, close our eyes, and hope something happens. Anyone who has tried to force themselves to sleep will know it doesn't work—sleep 'runs' in the opposite direction.

"That's why sleep hypnosis can really help to balance your circadian rhythm and help you get a good night's sleep," he added.

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Who Can Benefit From Sleep Hypnosis?

Garside said anyone at any age can benefit from sleep. "Everyone who wants to change their sleeping pattern can. Having the desire to change is all you need to precipitate moving towards a better sleep habit," the hypnotherapist said.

However, not everyone is able to be hypnotized, said psychologist Browning, who noted around 10 percent of people are "very responsive" to hypnosis, while 10 percent are "very resistant or impossible" to hypnotize. Most people fall somewhere in between those two ends of the spectrum.

"Therefore, the treatment is not appropriate for everybody. Generally speaking, people who view hypnosis favorably are more susceptible to hypnosis, as are children and adolescents," Browning said.

Good sleep hygiene also plays an important role in getting better sleep, Garside noted. Avoiding excitement, tea, coffee and alcohol just before bed is essential to "set the right tone for good sleep."

He also advises leaving your phone to charge in another room, as "the presence of a smartphone is often considered a prime suspect in the case against a good night's sleep," the hypnotherapist added.



A woman using her phone in bed at night. A smartphone is often considered "a prime suspect" in the case against a good night's sleep.

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Are there Any Risks Associated With Sleep Hypnosis?

Browning explained hypnotherapy is considered safe when conducted by a trained professional and it requires informed consent at the start of the procedure.

While it is "generally considered safe" when done by a licensed professional, hypnosis is not recommended for those with severe mental illness, such as schizophrenia or drug misuse, she said.

Some side effects can include anxiety, dizziness, headaches and occasional creation of false memories. "Therefore hypnosis should be done with caution," the psychologist warned.

Garside also said sleep hypnosis is "perfectly safe" as long as you are working with an experienced practitioner.

He advises seeing a hypnotherapist who offers a free consultation, which allows you to gauge whether they're the right hypnotherapist for you. Check to see if they belong to an approved association or society and look out for any online reviews, Garside said.