

Five ways hypnosis can help our minds

By Ellen Waldman

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Most people have some understanding about hypnosis and mindfulness. But you might not realize all the benefits of these two modalities as aging happens. If I told you to think about hypnosis, would you have a vague memory of someone saying, “You’re getting sleepy?” If so, be prepared to become much more current with the field of medical hypnotherapy. The “state of inner absorption, concentration and focused attention” brought on by hypnosis may help us use our minds more powerfully, according to the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis (ASCH).

Here are five ways that hypnosis has been shown to provide verifiable results, all based on scientific studies. These symptoms are probably familiar to some older adults. Hypnosis can:

- Help improve deep sleep;
- Ease symptoms of irritable bowel syndrome;
- Quell hot flashes;
- Ease pain; and
- Calm nerves.

Now, consider the practice of mindfulness. The designation “mindfulness” has become more popular, and the practice more accessible for some people to “wrap their minds around” than meditation. In fact, there is really not a big difference between mindfulness and meditation. Basically, it’s simply bringing your awareness to this moment.

Both hypnotherapy and mindfulness practices are offered through the Ashland Mindfulness Institute (www.ashlandmindfulnessinstitute.com; 541-488-3180). I recently spoke with the director of this school, Rochelle Jaffe, M.S., CChT, clinical hypnotherapist, mindfulness and mindful self-compassion expert, who’s lived in Ashland since 1980. Through this institute, she offers private sessions, mindfulness courses, and retreats.

Here’s some advice from Rochelle: Our usual thinking minds love patterns. They operate in the easiest possible way, which often means repeating what they are used to. When the old pattern isn’t working, our usual thinking minds don’t know what to do. However, as Albert Einstein is reputed to have said, “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.” I asked Rochelle how mindfulness practices assist aging adults. Here is her response:

“There is some amazing research that shows the helpful effects of mindfulness on aging brains and bodies. Dr. Sara Lazar, of Harvard University, demonstrated that the brain of a 60-year-old meditator (meditating 30 minutes a day), is as large and heavy as that of a normal 40 year old! And, the brain of the meditator is largest in the areas of empathy and higher-order thinking.

“Mindfulness practice is shown to reduce stress and improve cognition. Studies show that it improves attention and reaction time, and reduces anxiety and chronic pain. It supports improved sleep quality, reduces distress, and promotes vitality. People who practice mindfulness regularly are calmer, recover

from stressors more quickly, and report feeling more present and alive. Because age-related decline of all of our systems is related to stress, a mindfulness practice may reduce cellular aging.

"In the past decade, there has been a lot of research-over 450 studies-in a specific area of mindfulness, called mindful self-compassion. A simple way to describe mindful self-compassion is: learning how to treat ourselves as kindly as we would treat a beloved friend. Studies in this area consistently demonstrate that people who develop mindful self-compassion are more resilient and have a higher quality of life. Our level of self-compassion is one of the strongest predictors of whether we'll feel anxious or depressed. Especially when we have health challenges, mindful self-compassion is highly related to feelings of well-being.

"Hypnotherapy and mindfulness are both ways in which we can quiet the chatter of our usual thinking minds, and connect with a deeper sense of peace, calm and inner wisdom. Both practices help us to cultivate a positive sense of who we are, and to find meaningful ways of working with our minds, emotions and bodies."

If these ideas strike a chord, you might give them a try. Perhaps it's hypnotherapy to change old patterns that no longer serve, or practicing mindfulness as a support for healthy aging. A bit of mindful self-compassion sounds like a balm for those facing their own and their loved ones' aging years.