



Listen carefully...

How to use **self-hypnosis** to achieve your sports and fitness goals



However, scientists have come up with interesting evidence that the mental states that we tend to label as 'hypnotic' – so-called trance states, where we're less conscious of our actions or act on automatic pilot – are actually part of our everyday experience. Indeed, research shows that we're in these kinds of states for 90% of our waking day, and only fully conscious i.e. attending to what's going on in the here and now for about 10%. If you think about how much of your time is spent daydreaming, about what you've done or would like to do, for example, you'll soon see the truth in this.

Controlling trance states

From my point of view this is good news; if trance is something everybody does everyday, then everybody who comes to see me to improve their sports or fitness performance is already practicing in something that's going to help them. It's why most people don't feel that they've been hypnotised; they're expecting the lights to go out, or to experience something weird, whereas it's actually just the deliberate use of a process that they experience, for example, when they're zoned out at a meeting, or thinking in front of the TV.

Three steps to self-hypnosis

STEP 1: Induction: This is simply an opportunity to change the state you are in to one where you're more relaxed. Here's an easy way to do it quickly:

Imagine that getting to a relaxed state is going to take you a number of steps – anything from 5-10 is fine. Rest somewhere comfortably, preferably with your head supported, and where you won't be disturbed. Close your eyes and pay attention to how relaxed you feel. This is the first step of the journey. Now ask yourself, 'If I was to relax just enough to get me to the next level (or step), what would change? How would I know that I've got there?' Everybody will be different: you may notice parts of your body getting lighter or heavier, you might see shapes or patterns on your eyelids or your breathing might change. Whatever you notice changing, make a mental note of it. Then repeat the question and be curious about what the next thing will be. Repeat this for the number of steps you decided to take. What you'll then have is a list of things that are your mind/body responses to the process of relaxing. We all tend to have our own mental process for doing so – just like we follow the same process when falling asleep. By learning what these steps are, all you have to do is to work through them: 'first my eyes feel heavy, then my breathing slows, then I see the colour purple on my eyelids' and so on to access your relaxed state. A

By Cognitive Hypnotherapist **Trevor Silvester**

Many people have an overly dramatic perception of what hypnosis is – bordering on distrust in many cases. One of the downsides of being a cognitive hypnotherapist is that people often think that I'm going to make them dance like a chicken or I'll have a Svengali-like level of control over them! Unfortunately, this misconception can become a barrier

preventing them from realising the great benefits that self-hypnosis can have in regard to achieving their sports and fitness goals.

Daydreaming - or hypnotic state?

Opinions vary greatly about what hypnosis is. Some see it as a special state that the hypnotist puts someone into whilst others think that it's merely something people go along with because of social pressure.

phenomenon called 'fractionation' means that the more you do it, the quicker and deeper you will fall.

After half a dozen experiences of following these steps you will probably find that you don't need the induction stage, your unconscious will have learnt the skill and you'll find yourself able to relax really quickly. Trance will simply arise from listening to what you create for the second step.

STEP 2: Positive suggestion:

The second step is using this relaxed state to programme your mind with positive suggestions that fit your need/goal. Just simply 'speak' these in your head, for example, 'I'm motivated to train... my energy is growing and I feel confident...'. However, after a while it is likely that you're going to be so good at relaxing that you'll nod off, so I suggest that you record your positive suggestions, using a dicaphone or microphone attachment for your iPod - just press play when you feel relaxed.

I've written whole books on hypnotic language and there can be a lot of subtlety in how the suggestions are constructed, but for the purposes of this article I'm going to give you just some simple guidelines. These will prime your unconscious to focus on gaining what you're suggesting.

Priming

Priming is a term from psychology that describes, how what is on our mind is brought to our attention in the world around us so, for example, when you're trying for a baby every woman you see seems to be pregnant. I think that priming is one of the key reasons why suggestion works - essentially you're saying to your brain, 'bring to my mind whatever is going on around me that supports my suggestion', or, 'make me aware of any feelings that I need to feel that help me get my outcome'. Harking back to scientific research again, apparently 80% of what we perceive around us is the result of the brain's interpretation of the information flowing through our senses - so in a sense we 'make up' most of what we're aware of. To further explain: in a situation where we are primed to feel nervous, for example a sporting competition, we'll often find our brain interpreting the sounds of the crowd, the look of our opponents, and our physiological nervous responses, and so the feeling will grow.

Conversely, if you've programmed your unconscious to expect to feel confident, then your brain will filter what's going on around you to fit that expectation. Here's a great way to achieve this mental state: imagine you have two parts to your mind, the 'thinker' and the 'prover'. The idea is

'what the thinker thinks, the prover proves'. Self-hypnosis can set your mind up to think whatever is needed to lead you to your goals, and your prover will filter events around you in order to support these thoughts. It's how top sportspeople seem to be able to maintain their belief in the face of adversity - their prover is simply making whatever is happening mean what it needs to mean to keep them strong. So the aim of your suggestion is to prime your unconscious thinker to believe

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something that is useful to you. Write a list of what ideas would support this, and make sure you follow this rule: 'say it how you want it'.

Suggest the positive

If I say to you 'don't think of a blue tree', what comes to your mind? That's right; the brain has to process a negative. So if you make suggestions to yourself - as many sports people who choke do - like 'don't miss the shot', 'don't be demotivated' or 'don't lose the match', your mind has to see those things happen first in order not to think of them. Of course by then it's too late. We tend to get what we pay attention to, so you can see how counter productive this is. So your suggestions should clearly state your outcome. There are, given the above examples, much better ways of thinking - 'when I take the shot, I'm relaxed and accurate', and 'I'm focused on winning, and I know I can do it'.

Also, repeat the ideas more than once. You want your brain to register these ideas as being more important than the thought of what you're having for tea. Hearing it on more than one occasion within a self-hypnosis session helps to achieve this. Make the suggestion last for no longer than nine minutes. Everybody can spare nine minutes in their day, but 30 minutes, or even 20, can quickly seem like an imposition - especially last thing at night, which is a great time to listen.

Wordweaving

The method of hypnotic suggestion that I have developed is called 'wordweaving'. You can apply it to your goal/goals:

"As the days go by, just listening to this begins to make a difference in the way I want it to... Different things each day coming to my attention to let me know that I'm moving closer and closer to what I want... My confidence growing in what I want to achieve that means that soon the habit of listening is just one of the new things I've developed that is bringing me the success that I'm working well for..."

You can download a complete 9-minute sports performance mp3 from my site by visiting www.questinstitute.co.uk.

STEP 3: Bringing yourself back to the present:

The third phase of a self-hypnosis session is simply bringing yourself back to the present moment. There's no rush. The easiest way is simply to add the following to the end of your suggestions:

"As I think of the number one I can take a few deep breaths that begin to bring me back into the room... with number two I can get in touch with my arms and legs as they return to normal so that as I count to three I can open my eyes, focused and ready."

Of course, if you're doing this at bedtime don't waste time waking up, turn off your recorder and turn over.

So, don't be misled by false impressions of what hypnosis is and what it can do. The reality is that self-hypnosis is a powerful tool that we can all have access to - the secret is learning how to use it to your advantage - and the benefits can be fantastic. Try using these ideas to make a simple repetitive recording to help you focus on a particular area of your sports or fitness performance that you'd like to improve. You'll be amazed by the results - and not a dancing chicken in sight! **UF**



Trevor Silvester is the founder of the Quest Institute which specialises in cognitive hypnotherapy and NLP and is one of the largest and most successful hypnotherapy

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