***Is Hypnosis a Placebo!***

***By Larry Garrett***

The power of the placebo effect;

Can you imagine treating a symptom with your mind? There is more to the placebo effect than just positive thinking. It also may require three key ingredients, Anticipation, Expectation and Hope.

Imagine the power of your brain that can convince your body a non-real treatment such as a placebo is the real thing. Your mind is the most powerful tool there is for healing. I you add the skills of hypnosis it can add to this success of mind healing. — the so-called placebo effect — This type of healing has been around for millennia. Science has found under the right circumstances a placebo can be just as effective and, in some instances, better than traditional treatments.

"The placebo effect is more than positive thinking — believing or anticipating a treatment or procedure will work will create a better opportunity foe success. It's about creating a stronger connection between the brain, mind and body and how they work together," says Professor Ted Kaptchuk of Harvard-affiliated Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, whose research focuses on the placebo effect.

According to him, placebos won't lower your cholesterol or shrink a tumor. Instead, placebos work on symptoms modulated by the brain, like the perception of pain. "Placebos may make you feel better, but they will not cure you," says Kaptchuk. "They have been shown to be most effective for conditions like pain management, stress-related insomnia, and cancer treatment side effects like fatigue and nausea." Of course, many hypnotherapists may disagree with this statement. Many of us have observed the reduction of a tumor or a curing factor doubted by everyone including the patient/client. Personally, I went through stage 4 of neck cancer and received a prognosis of 11/2 to 2 years to be cancer free. I was cancer free in 7 months with using self-hypnosis everyday visualizing I was well. This to me was anticipation.

The [placebo effect](https://www.health.harvard.edu/blog/the-placebo-effect-amazing-and-real-201511028544) for many years was considered a sign of failure. A placebo is used in clinical trials to test the effectiveness of treatments and is most often used in drug studies. For instance, people in one group get the actual drug, while the others receive an inactive drug, or placebo. The participants in the clinical trial don’t know if they receive the real thing or the placebo. This way, the researchers can measure if the drug works by comparing how both groups react. If they both have the same reaction — improvement or not — the drug is deemed not to work. Experts have concluded reacting to a placebo is not proof a certain treatment doesn't work, but rather another, non-pharmacological mechanism may be present.

***William Mitchell and I will discuss how hypnosis can become a placebo and assist as a drug has.***

How placebos work is still not quite understood, but it involves a complex neurobiological reaction that includes everything from increases in feel-good neurotransmitters, like [endorphins](https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/endorphins-the-brains-natural-pain-reliever) and [dopamine](https://www.health.harvard.edu/mind-and-mood/dopamine-the-pathway-to-pleasure), to greater activity in certain brain regions linked to moods, emotional reactions, and self-awareness. All of it can have therapeutic benefit. If I would have expressed fear within myself during cancer healing, I may not have healed at all or healed slowly even with the best medication. "The placebo effect is a way for your brain to tell the body what it needs to feel better," For me, my placebo was using self-hypnosis pretending I was okay and while hypnotized I had no doubt. Trust is a key ingredient to placebo success.

But placebos are not all about releasing brainpower. You also need the ritual of treatment. "When you look at these studies that compare drugs with placebos, there is the entire environmental and ritual factor at work," says Kaptchuk. "You have to go to a clinic at certain times and be examined by medical professionals in white coats. You receive all kinds of exotic pills and undergo strange procedures. All this can have a profound impact on how the body perceives symptoms because you feel you are getting attention and care." With hypnosis, you need a ritual. You need a pretalk to determine the expectation of the client. You need to educate your client as to what to expect. You need to create an induction which feels like something is happening and you need to have a conclusion as though the client is feeling better.

Placebos often work because people don't know they are getting one. But what happens if you know you are getting a placebo? A study led by Kaptchuk and published in *Science Translational Medicine* explored this by testing how people reacted to migraine pain medication. One group took a migraine drug labeled with the drug's name, another took a placebo labeled "placebo," and a third group took nothing. The researchers discovered that the placebo was 50% as effective as the real drug to reduce pain after a migraine attack.

How can you give yourself a placebo besides taking a fake pill? Practicing self-help methods is one way. "Engaging in the ritual of healthy living — eating right, exercising, yoga, quality social time, meditating — probably provides some of the key ingredients of a placebo effect," says Kaptchuk. While these activities are positive interventions in their own right, the level of attention you give can enhance their benefits. "The attention and emotional support you give yourself is often not something you can easily measure, but it can help you feel more comfortable in the world, and that can go a long way when it comes to healing." When I see a client, I expect them to listen to a recording of the session and/or do self-hypnosis every day for about 2-3 weeks and then as they need. I feel meditation, prayer or self-hypnosis is a ritual needed every day. Any form of mindfulness will activate the healing process of the brain to bring about wellness.

The researchers speculated that a driving force beyond this reaction was the simple act of taking a pill. "People associate the ritual of taking medicine as a positive healing effect,” “Even if they know it's not medicine, the action itself can stimulate the brain into thinking the body is being healed." Could this driving force be called Hypnosis and the mind has an expectation of what will be successful and then create the success as they would being hypnotized. I have felt hypnosis to work best with a factor of anticipation. Or as some would say, expectation. And still another is Hope, a feeling of expectation and a desire for a particular thing to happen. i.e., I hope this placebo cures me!

Anticipation is the act of looking forward with excitement to what is coming resting in the assurance it will be good of whatever form it takes, such as a placebo. As a hypnotist, when we excite our clients to the potential of success available anticipation begins to occur. When the patient working with placebos becomes excited of the potential of a pill which may cure them, they become excited as well. Could his be hypnosis?

Expectation is the experience of projecting an imagined reality toward the future. You try to predict the future and restrict your happiness to one outcome.

You hope this will work, however the excitement lacks and is needed for this extra boost to create the success. Always be excited by the outcome, never feel entitled.

I feel strongly hypnosis is one of the greatest placebos we have. All three are available with hypnosis it is up to you the practitioner to creates anticipation for success.