

Hijack Your Brain

CAN HYPNOSIS REALLY PLACE YOU UNDER JEDI-LIKE MIND CONTROL? WE DIG DEEPER TO FIND OUT.

After watching *Trance*, a psychological thriller by English director Danny Boyle, we can't help but wonder if the brain can indeed be manipulated to such extremes.

In this mind fudge of a film, Rosario Dawson plays a hypnotherapist whom James McAvoy's character visits - not because he wants to quit smoking or lose weight, but because he needs to recover memories of where he stashed a stolen multimillion-dollar painting. As she struggles to regain custody of her own life, she manipulates him into losing control of his.

Of course, this being a movie, dramatic liberties are taken. But you do come out of the cinema thinking hypnosis is both a practical and powerful tool.

Besides, researchers from Finland and Sweden not only produced evidence for the existence of a genuine hypnotic state, but also recently published two studies in the journals *Plos One* and *International Journal Of Clinical And Experimental Hypnosis* showing that hypnotic suggestion can trigger visual hallucinations.

However, to suggest hypnosis can make you do things against your will is not based on fact, points out clinical hypnotherapist Wolff von Auer, managing director of Counseling & Hypnotherapy Hub, which is recognised by the Health Promotion Board. "If the person resists hypnotism, it will not work," says Dr Wolff.

In reality, hypnotherapy has a wide range of medical uses, says Dr Lim Boon Leng, a psychiatrist in private practice at Gleneagles Medical Centre, who notes: "Back in the 19th century, it was the choice of anaesthesia ahead of surgery, before modern anaesthetic medications were available. It's also a valid form of psychotherapy for psychological ailments."

But contrary to what *Trance*

will have you believe, Dr Lim warns of hypnotherapists using hypnosis to help regain memory. "There's a risk of false memories developing, which is particularly troublesome in cases where subjects may be involved in legal proceedings."

So, stay out of trouble and in control with these practical uses of hypnotherapy instead.

MAKE STRESS VANISH

Hypnosis is a normal physiological state of "deep inner focus" like meditation that most of us can channel, says Dr Lim, suggesting: "You can learn self-hypnosis and use it to relax."

✔ **TRY THIS** Take a deep breath, hold, exhale, and then let go of all tension. Allow yourself to enter that "feel good trance", says Dr Wolff. "It's the state of heightened focus and a blocking of all distractions. For example, when you're jogging and aren't aware of the people around you, or don't hear someone calling your name, this is when relaxation takes place."

BE GOOD WITH CHILDREN

If you're a father or have to babysit your nephews and nieces, you can practise hypnotic techniques to get them to listen to you, says clinical hypnotherapist Karen Ong of Professional

Mindworks Center. She reveals: "Hypnosis works on the subconscious mind, which is more receptive to positive suggestions."

✔ **TRY THIS** When children under your care are engrossed in, say, playing an electronic game, Karen suggests saying words to the effect of: "Happy playing. You can enjoy more of this every time you finish your homework."

MANAGE PAIN

If you're recovering from a sprained ankle or pulled muscle, skip the analgesic aisle and try hypnotherapy instead. Recent research from Stanford University published in the *Archives Of General Psychiatry* journal may show brain-scan evidence that while hypnosis doesn't work for all, the researchers also noted potential proof that hypnosis actually modulates activity in brain regions that control sensation and behaviour.

✔ **TRY THIS** Make an appointment with a registered hypnotherapist. Apart from controlling anxiety and combating phobias, hypnosis can be used clinically to manage pain. "I've helped a young man through a wisdom tooth extraction without anaesthetic injection," reveals Karen. Dr Wolff agrees, adding that only a qualified hypnotherapist can do this.

TOTAL RECALL

Use these neurological techniques to sharpen your memory!

1 Sex at least twice a week improves your powers of recall, according to *The Journal Of Neuroscience*. The chemical oxytocin, released during the act, enhances your ability to recognise faces. Her name is down to you.

2 The memory-boosting benefits of yoga can be done in front of the TV, say German researchers. Sit with the soles of your feet together, bend forward and hold for 15 seconds. Repeat 10 times, once a day.

3 Three gym sessions a week preserves your memory as you age, according to research in *Medicine & Science In Sports & Exercise*. Best results were seen with 40 minutes of weight training, followed by 20 minutes of high-intensity cardio.

4 Regular pop quizzes are more effective than hours of reading to make info stick, studies at Purdue University in the US show. Do a self-test every five minutes for total recall.

5 A year of aerobic exercise can up the size of your hippocampus (essential for memory) by 2 per cent, found a study at the University of Illinois in the US. Your minimum requirement: a brisk 30-minute walk at least three times a week.

— MARK PEACOCK

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