



# Clinical Hypnotherapy and Psychotherapy Association Ltd

## Information Sheet No. 4: Managing Pain

### **Understanding Pain**

Physical pain exists to warn us of an immediate threat to our bodies. While it might not feel like it at the time, pain can be of immense benefit – it tells us when to stop doing something that is harmful.

The problem with pain is when it ceases to be an “early warning system” and, in effect, stops serving any useful purpose. While a headache that leads to an eye examination that detects the sufferer is short-sighted is to be welcomed, an ongoing migraine serves no purpose other than to impair the patient’s judgement and decision-making.

### **How it affects you**

Chronic physical pain is debilitating to the point where sufferers find the most mundane tasks difficult to complete. The longer the suffering continues the more the person feels condemned to a life of pain. The stress caused by enduring pain would bring most people close to a mental breakdown.

A trip to the doctor to ‘get rid’ of the pain can be a frustrating experience as the treatments a patient will receive only deal with the physical aspect of the pain.

While it is impossible to get rid of all pain from our lives, it is possible, through hypnotherapy, to manage chronic pain and eliminate the worst symptoms.

Pain management is at its most effective when hypnotherapy is combined with some form of medication.

### **How Hypnotherapy can help**

Hypnotherapy is a proven method for dealing with chronic pain, like headaches. (1) The 1992 study of 42 patients suffering from chronic headaches found that all responded poorly to conventional treatments. The group was split in two, the first receiving hypnotherapy to relieve their daily headaches; the rest acted as a

comparison group. The hypnotherapy group experienced reduced frequency and duration of headaches, cutting the intensity by about 30%.

"These results are impressive in such a difficult, hard-to-treat group of patients," said Egilius Spierings, M.D., Ph.D. director of the headache section, division of neurology at Brigham and Women's Hospital.

Hypnotherapy dulls pain perception, a 2004 study (2) found. According to the report researchers found that volunteers under hypnosis experienced significant pain reduction in response to painful heat. They also had a distinctly different pattern of brain activity compared to when they were not hypnotized and experienced the heat.

## Clinical Hypnotherapy and Psychotherapy Association Information sheet no. 1 Anxiety

The changes in brain activity suggest that hypnosis somehow blocks the pain signal from getting to the parts of the brain that perceive pain.

Back pain is another issue that causes chronic, ongoing suffering for many patients. The good news is that hypnotherapy can help and in a test (3) results showed that pain intensity was significantly lower with hypnotherapy as compared with acupuncture.

There is a host of pain related issues that hypnotherapy can help with, including cancer, skin burns, post-surgery recovery (4) and the more traditional 'everyday' ailments like headaches and back pain.

In summary, a course of hypnotherapy is extremely effective in managing pain because, simply put, the mind plays a crucial role in pain – as the saying goes, “there is no pain until it reaches the brain”.

### References

- (1) Gutfeld, G. and Rao, L. (1992). "Use of Hypnosis with Patients Suffering from Chronic Headaches, Seriously Resistant to Other Treatment," As reported in *Prevention*, 44, 24-25.
- (2) Schulz-Stübner, Sebastian M.D., Ph.D; Krings, Timo M.D; Meister, Ingo G. M.D; Rex, Stefan M.D; Thron, Armin M.D., Ph.D; Rossaint, Rolf M.D., Ph.D (2004)  
“Clinical Hypnosis Modulates Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging Signal Intensities and Pain Perception in a Thermal Stimulation Paradigm”
- (3) Moret V; Forster A; Laverriere MC; Lambert H; Gaillard RC; Bourgeois P; Haynal A; Gemperle M; Buchser E . Mechanism of analgesia induced by hypnosis and acupuncture: is there a difference? *Pain (NETHERLANDS)* May 1991,45 (2) p135-40
- (4) Montgomery, G.H., DuHamel, K.N., and Redd, W.N. (2000). A meta-analysis of hypnotic analgesia: How effective is hypnosis? *International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis*, 48, 138-153.

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