

## Hypnosis Session before Breast Cancer Surgery Aids Recovery

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Instead of pills and needles, hypnosis may ease the pain of surgery -- both during and after the procedure.

According to a new study, women who received hypnosis before breast cancer surgery needed less anesthesia during the procedure, reported less pain afterward, needed less time in the operating room and had reduced costs.

"This helps women at a time when they could use help, and it has no side effects. It really only has side benefits," said Guy Montgomery, lead author of the report and associate professor in the department of oncological sciences at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York City.

Montgomery hopes that the study, published online in the Aug. 28 issue of the Journal of the National Cancer Institute, will promote greater use of hypnosis in medical treatments.

Side effects such as pain, nausea and fatigue -- both during and after breast cancer surgery -- are commonplace. Previous research has suggested that hypnosis, a simple and inexpensive procedure, can help ease these problems. One small clinical study indicated that hypnosis was also effective for breast cancer patients about to undergo surgery.

For the new study, 200 women set for breast cancer surgery were randomly assigned to receive either 15 minutes of hypnosis with a psychologist or assigned to a group that simply spoke with a psychologist.

During the hypnosis session, the patients received suggestions for relaxation and pleasant imagery as well as advice on how to reduce pain, nausea and fatigue. They also received instructions on how to use hypnosis on their own.

The researchers found that women in the hypnosis group required less anesthesia and sedatives than patients in the control group, and also reported less pain, nausea, fatigue, discomfort and emotional upset after the surgery.

Those who received hypnosis also spent almost 11 minutes less time in surgery and had their surgical costs reduced by about \$773, mainly as a result of the shorter time.

Although people think that hypnosis strips a person of control, it actually does just the opposite, said Dr. David Spiegel, author of an accompanying editorial in the journal and Willson professor and associate chairman of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at Stanford University School of Medicine.

"This is something that empowers patients," Spiegel explained. "If you're fighting, you think you're protecting yourself, but, actually, you're losing control, because you're getting into a struggle with your own body. You can teach people to float instead of fighting. You get the body comfortable and think more clearly. The weird thing is it actually works. If thoughts can make the body worse, it follows that thoughts could actually make the body feel better."

But will hypnosis catch on with health-care providers?

"We have this in-built skepticism of what goes on in the brain and the mind, and the idea is that the only real intervention is a physical one. Yet what supposedly distinguishes us is this huge brain on top of our bodies," Spiegel said. "It seems more scientific and desirable to give drugs than it does to talk to people and have them reorganize the way they're managing their bodies."

There are other obstacles. Many doctors find it more expedient to write a prescription than learn to perform hypnosis. Also, there's no industry pushing the technique as there is with drugs, Spiegel said.

On the positive side, little investment is needed to get a hypnosis program going, Montgomery said. "A psychologist or nurse could get training in a short period of time," he said. "It's not that involved."

Dr. Darlene Miltenburg, assistant professor of surgery at Texas A&M Health Science Center College of Medicine, called the new study "superb."

"Anybody who has an open mind would realize that this treatment works and is scientifically proven. It's not black magic," Miltenburg said. "It's real, and we do use it here. It's very time consuming, that's part of the problem, taking a pill is much easier. But just like many things in life, we want a quick fix rather than something that takes longer."