

Hypnosis As Smoking Cessation Therapy Needs Further Scrutiny

COLUMBUS, Ohio - Smokers who are hopeful that hypnosis will help them kick their habit need to temper their expectations, according to new research. A review of nearly five dozen studies showed that while hypnosis may have some effect as an anti-smoking treatment, it is by no means an end-all and be-all treatment for smoking cessation.

"Giving hypnosis the stamp of a well-established treatment for smoking cessation is premature," said Joseph Green, a study co-author and associate professor of psychology at Ohio State University's Lima campus. The research appears in a recent issue of the International Journal of Clinical and Experimental Hypnosis. Green conducted the research with Steven Jay Lynn, of the State University of New York at Binghamton.

The researchers compiled the results of 59 studies. They concluded that smokers who underwent hypnosis fared better in terms of abstaining from smoking than did smokers who had no intervention. However, it was difficult to determine whether hypnosis had any benefit above and beyond other treatments - such as behaviour modification - that were often of considerable benefit to patients.

"Many times, hypnosis is packaged with other, more comprehensive treatments," Green said. "So it's extremely difficult to tease apart and determine which individual therapy got the smoker to quit."

Besides, Green pointed out, many of the studies failed to use biochemical measures - physical markers that indicate carbon monoxide levels in the body - in conjunction with the smoking cessation treatments.

Biochemical measures are important to researchers who are trying to determine the effectiveness of specific treatments. "These markers can help verify treatment outcomes," Green said.

According to Green, one of the key problems in determining the effectiveness of hypnosis as a smoking cessation treatment is a lack of a standard way to conduct hypnosis. Across the studies, hypnosis treatments varied in the types of questions that were asked; the number of treatments each subject underwent; and the inclusion of other smoking-cessation interventions. "There is little reason to believe that hypnosis is any more effective than a number of other approaches to smoking cessation," Green said. Approaches range from self-help therapy to taking medication, and include nicotine replacement therapies, acupuncture, and individual and group counselling.

"A smoker who wants to quit should be offered a variety of potentially effective interventions," Green said. "That way, a person can choose the treatment or treatments that best suit him."