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Hypnosis could banish hay-fever

Hay fever sufferers could benefit from using self-hypnosis, researchers say.

A Swiss team at Basle University taught 66 people with hay-fever the art of hypnosis and found it helped them alleviate symptoms such as runny nose.



Hay-fever symptoms can be severe

The volunteers also took their regular anti-hay-fever drugs, but the effect of hypnosis appeared to be additive and reduce the doses they needed to take.

The findings appear in the medical journal *Psychotherapy and Psychosomatics*.

Self-hypnosis

The study took place over two years and included two hay fever seasons.

During the first year, some of the volunteers with hay-fever were taught and asked to regularly practise hypnosis as well as take their usual allergy medicine.

The hypnosis training consisted of one two-hour session with an experienced trainer.

The remaining volunteers had no other treatment apart from their normal allergy medication.

After a year, the researchers found the volunteers who had been using self-hypnosis had reported fewer symptoms related to hay-fever than their fellow volunteers.

Runny noses

During the second year, the researchers taught the remaining "untrained" volunteers how to use hypnosis. By the end of this year, these volunteers also reported improvement in their hay-fever symptoms.

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Although the improvement in symptoms was not statistically significant and, therefore, could have been down to chance alone, the researchers also found that the volunteers had cut down on the amount of hay-fever medication they used after learning self-hypnosis.

Professor Wolf Langewitz and his team also tested the volunteers in the laboratory to see what effect the hypnosis was having on the body.

“ While our findings are not a definite answer, this simple intervention is worth investigating further ”

Lead researcher Professor Wolf Langewitz

Using a machine that measured how forcefully a person could exhale through their nose, the researchers found that the hypnosis was helping to improve nasal airflow, even when the volunteers were exposed to things that triggered their hay-fever, such as pollen and grass.

Professor Langewitz said: "While our findings are not a definite answer, this simple intervention is worth investigating further.

"It is cheap and only takes a couple of hours to teach."

How it might work

He suspects that hypnosis might work by altering blood flow and helping alleviate congestion in the nose that can occur with hay-fever.

Dr Peter Whorwell from Wythenshawe Hospital in Manchester, who uses hypnotherapy to treat people suffering from irritable bowel syndrome, said some of his own patients who also had hay-fever had commented to him that their noses were less runny after hypnotherapy sessions.

He said: "It is known that you can alter blood flow with hypnosis.

"Hypnosis has been used for a variety of medical conditions, including asthma, eczema and migraines.

"It's definitely an area that is worth researching."

A spokeswoman from Allergy UK said they had heard anecdotal reports of hay-fever sufferers using hypnotherapy. However, they said they were unable to recommend any approaches that had not been extensively investigated and backed by strong scientific evidence.

Dr Adrian Morris, a GP in Surrey with a special interest in allergic disorders, said although hypnotherapy might be useful, what was far more helpful to lessen hay-fever symptoms was gradual, graded exposure to the trigger to increase tolerance.

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