

Online Group Gut Directed Hypnotherapy Courses for IBS

Hypnosis & Hypnotherapy – what are they?

Hypnosis is simply a state of increased focus of attention on one experience, whilst attention on the surroundings is decreased. We will all have experienced this in our everyday lives, for example when we are so engrossed in an activity (e.g. reading or watching a film) that we do not hear someone calling our name, or imagining ourselves relaxing on a beautiful sunny beach instead of focusing on the work in front of us! Hypnotherapy is a term that is often used to describe hypnosis used by a health professional to treat mental or physical health conditions or change habits. In gut directed hypnotherapy, the hypnosis is used to change symptoms in the gut e.g. in Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) or the ongoing symptoms which may accompany Coeliac Disease or Inflammatory Bowel Disease despite medical treatment.

The gut-brain connection

We have all experienced 'butterflies' in our stomach when we have felt nervous at some point in our lives. Other emotions such as anger, sadness or anxiety can also trigger gut symptoms as the brain and gut are closely connected. Signals are sent from the brain to the gut and from the gut to the brain via the nervous system and gut microbiome. This two-way communication is known as the gut-brain axis. Hypnosis has been shown to help treat anxiety or depression which may drive IBS symptoms and can also target the gut function itself.

The National Institute for Clinical and Care Excellence (NICE) have recommended that psychological interventions (including hypnotherapy) should be considered for people with IBS whose symptoms have not improved with medical management after 12 months (1). Despite the fact that research has shown that courses of gut directed hypnotherapy (GDH) can improve IBS symptoms and quality of life, only a few centres in the UK currently offer this on the NHS. Some studies have provided GDH in 12 sessions on an individual basis (2) but more recently, studies have shown that it can also work in fewer sessions (3-6), in a group setting (6-8) or via an online platform (9, 10). Often the patients who have been involved in these trials have struggled with their symptoms for a long time and previously not found dietary or medical management effective.

What does The Contented Gut course entail?

The course will run online via zoom and consist of an introductory session followed by seven sessions. You will need to allow up to one hour for the introductory session and up to 45 minutes for the remaining sessions. Each session will take you through a relaxation and visualisation to help your mind and body relax and notice your symptoms less. The course will be run in groups of up to six people at each time.

Can anyone trial hypnosis?

It is suitable for most people but there are a few exceptions; people with severe depression, dementia or psychosis should not trial hypnosis. If you have had any severe mental health issues in the past or are currently receiving care from a psychologist or psychiatrist for mental health issues including an eating disorder, please contact us to discuss whether the course would be appropriate for you.

Will I stay in control?

Yes! In fact hypnosis helps you to gain more control over your mind and body rather than less. You will also be able to remember the hypnosis experience and remain aware of where you are.

Does hypnosis work for everyone?

No, some people find hypnosis easier and more effective than others. Generally, the more quickly and easily you are able to reach a state of relaxation, the more effective it will be. On this course, in order for every participant to have the best chance of success, each session includes plenty of time encouraging a deep sense of physical and mental relaxation.

In 2022 we trialled a standardised course of GDH called the North Carolina Protocol (5) with 12 participants via Zoom (with 7 in smaller groups, and 5 seen individually). Nine (75%) of the 12 participants recorded improvement in their gut symptoms even though they reported higher stress levels during that time; overall anxiety and depression scores improved and other symptoms also improved such as headaches, fatigue, muscle/joint pain and heartburn. Quality of life scores improved in 11 (92%) of the participants and visceral sensitivity score (which is related to anxiety about gut symptoms) improved in 10 (83%). All participants found that it helped them to relax and some have reported that they have since been able to introduce more foods back into their diets. Although it was only a small trial, we found no clear difference in effectiveness between those who took part in groups versus those who were seen individually.

How easy is hypnosis?

Some people find it easier to enter hypnosis than others, however practice between sessions will help. All hypnosis is considered to be self-hypnosis as you remain in control, so it is not necessary to always be guided by a therapist. You will therefore be encouraged to practice with a recording between sessions.

How often will I need to practice?

You will be sent a link to a recording to practice with after the second session and you should practice with the recording at least 5 times a week between each session. The recording will last for approximately 15 minutes. You will continue to have access to the practice recording and to other recordings after the course to use in the future if needed.

What will I need for the sessions?

- To be able to sit or lie somewhere comfortable and quiet (but it does not have to be silent), where you will not be disturbed (by people or pets!). If sitting, you will be more comfortable in a chair with a high back/head rest.
- To have your camera on and microphone switched off.
- To be able to position your laptop/tablet/phone so that we can see you from your head to waist.
- To ensure that your device will not 'time out/go to sleep' during the session (as this may mean that we are not able to see you).
- Just relax and enjoy the sessions!

Can I have individual sessions instead of being in a group?

This may be possible depending on availability. If you would prefer individual sessions, please contact us to discuss further.

Course dates and price can be found on the website. If you are interested in taking part or have any further questions, please contact us: hello@thecontentedgut.com.

A few testimonials from courses so far....

- *'This course has been such a brilliant asset to me and my health, both physical and mental. It has helped me a lot overall with anxiety and stress from both everyday occurrences and related to my gut health. The sessions and the practice have helped me become more aware of my whole body inside and out and allowed me to take time to completely relax and listen to my body. (It) has helped me immensely to not panic and make my flair ups and symptoms worse. I've spent so many years feeling like I've been losing control of my own body and this has truly helped me regain so much of that control.'*
- *'I thoroughly enjoyed the sessions. Hypnotherapy gives me a wonderful feeling of calm. I love that I can take myself off to thoroughly relax when I acknowledge that I am in a bit of a tizz. I often do it in the evening to wipe away the day's anxiety. I feel more relaxed about the IBS and try not to let it become a 'thing'.'*
- *'It helps me to relax, feel less stressed, (be) able to introduce more foods and sleep better'.*
- *'I thought the course was excellent and has helped me to be more relaxed and less hard on myself about my symptoms. My gut is still very sensitive but I feel less stressed about that.'*

References

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