

Hypnosis helps hot flashes

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Hypnosis can help cut hot flashes by as much as 74%, shows a study supported by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. This is the first controlled, randomized study of the technique to manage hot flashes, which affect as much as 80% of women who go through menopause. The study was published online this month in *Menopause*, the journal of the North American Menopause Society.

Controlled, randomized studies may pit an active drug against an inactive [placebo pill](#). But it's hard to find a placebo for mind-body techniques. The researchers at the Mind-Body Medicine Research Laboratory at Baylor University, Waco, TX; the school of Nursing at Indiana University in Indianapolis, IN; and the College of Education at the University of Texas, Austin, met that challenge by randomly assigning the [postmenopausal women](#) volunteers to hypnotherapy or "structured attention," which is used as a control intervention with minimal effect.

The women who underwent [hypnosis](#) had five weekly sessions in which they received suggestions for mental images of coolness, a safe place, or relaxation, whatever their preference. They also got an audio recording of a hypnotic induction and were asked to practice it daily. The control group had five sessions in which a clinician provided discussion of their symptoms, attentive listening, interpersonal exchange, monitoring, measurement, and encouragement and avoided negative suggestions. The controls also got a recording that they were asked to listen to daily, but this one had information about hot flashes.

All the women kept diaries that tracked hot flash frequency and severity,

and they also had hot flash frequency measured objectively by a skin conductance monitor. After 12 weeks, the women who underwent hypnosis reported 75% fewer hot flashes, compared with 13% fewer among the controls, and an 80% reduction in hot flash scores (a combination of frequency and severity), compared with 15% in controls. Skin conductance showed a 57% reduction in hot flashes for the women who underwent hypnosis, compared with 10% in the controls. The hypnosis participants also reported significantly less interference with their lives from hot flashes and better sleep than controls. Moreover, their level of satisfaction with the treatment was high.

How hypnosis eases hot flashes isn't clear. The authors of the study speculated that it may be because hypnosis may improve the function of the parasympathetic nervous system. This system is popularly called the "rest and digest" system, which puts the brakes on the sympathetic or "fight or flight" nervous system that controls body functions that ramp up during [hot flashes](#), such as sweating and heart rate.

Provided by The North American Menopause Society

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