

Hypnosis may help reduce distress of cancer treatment in children

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Hypnosis may help reduce the distress of cancer treatment in children. Credit: University of Exeter

Hypnosis could help to reduce the fear of medical procedures in children and young people with cancer.

New research led by the University of Exeter found promising evidence that hypnosis can reduce the distress associated with injections and other needle procedures, such as extracting bone marrow and giving chemotherapy.

Previous research has shown that these procedures often provoke more anxiety in children and [young people](#) than the [cancer](#) itself. Up to half of children with cancer experience clinically significant emotional distress. This can cause additional anguish for the child and for their families and have a long-lasting impact on mental health.

The Exeter team worked with Devon Integrated Children's Service to analyse all the available evidence on ways to reduce this anxiety without using drugs. The study is published in *Psycho-Oncology* and was supported by the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) Collaboration for Leadership in Applied Health Research and Care South West Peninsula (PenCLAHRC).

Tamsin Ford, Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the University of Exeter Medical School, said: "Getting treatment for cancer as a child is clearly extremely distressing for both the young person and their family. We must do all we can do to protect their [mental health](#) during this highly emotional time. Hypnosis is inexpensive to deliver, and our research found that it was the technique that was most studied, and showed promise in reducing children's anxiety about the many [medical procedures](#) they have to endure. We now need high quality trials to be sure whether hypnosis should be adopted in clinics."

The team also looked at evidence around listening to music, virtual reality and [cognitive behavioural therapy](#), however the research about whether or not these strategies reduced children's distress when faced with needle procedures was contradictory.

The paper, "Effectiveness of non-pharmacological interventions to reduce procedural anxiety in children and adolescents undergoing treatment for cancer: a systematic review and meta-analysis," is published in *Psycho-Oncology*.

More information: Michael Nunns et al. Effectiveness of nonpharmacological interventions to reduce procedural anxiety in children and adolescents undergoing treatment for cancer: A systematic review and meta-analysis, *Psycho-Oncology* (2018). [DOI: 10.1002/pon.4749](https://doi.org/10.1002/pon.4749)

Provided by University of Exeter

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