

Hypnosis transforms treatment for chronic pain

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Chronic low-back pain is the leading cause of disability in Australia and will develop in around 40 percent of the four million Australians who experience low back pain. Credit: Shutterstock

Researchers from UNSW Sydney and Neuroscience Research Australia (NeuRA), Universidade Cidade de São Paulo, Brazil and the University of Washington, US have identified a new drug-free treatment which combines hypnosis with pain management education to reduce the intensity of chronic low back pain.

Chronic low back pain is the leading cause of disability in Australia and will develop in around 40% of the 4 million Australians who experience low back pain.

Associate Professor James McAuley from NeuRA and UNSW Sydney said that despite the availability of [pain medications](#) and other pain therapies, an ideal treatment which benefits the majority of [chronic pain sufferers](#) has not been identified.

"Most of the available therapies have significant

side effects, or risks of serious adverse events," said Associate Professor McAuley.

"Hypnosis is a safe drug-free method which we have shown can help reduce [pain intensity](#), disability, and catastrophising of pain by those receiving the combined treatment.

"It helps the brain to calm the noise of pain, providing a much needed respite for the patient."

The study, published in the *Journal of Pain*, shows the addition of hypnosis enhances the treatment effects of pain education in the short and medium term. The study provides evidence supporting a new combined treatment option for teaching patients to self-manage chronic low back pain which has a relatively low cost and can be offered in groups.

"Hypnosis is a state of consciousness where attention is focused and peripheral awareness is reduced, and there is an enhanced capacity to respond to suggestion," said Associate Professor McAuley.

When used for [pain treatment](#), hypnosis typically involves an "induction" during which the clinician invites patients to experience a state of focused awareness, followed by suggestions for changes in the sensory, cognitive and emotional domains of [pain experience](#).

Research at NeuRA is focused on developing evidence-based drug-free treatments for chronic [low back pain](#). In the next phase of the study, the research team will use MRI imaging to understand how hypnosis works to impact the brain.

Provided by University of New South Wales

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