



York and Scarborough
Teaching Hospitals
NHS Foundation Trust

Gut Directed Hypnotherapy For Brain Gut Axis disorders

Information for patients, relatives and carers

Gastroenterology

① For more information, please contact:

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What is hypnosis?

Hypnosis is a simple trance state similar to daydreaming. It is a different level of consciousness where you are neither awake nor asleep, and is very natural, safe and relaxing. During hypnosis your unconscious mind is more receptive to suggestions, so it can be used to make changes to improve your health and wellbeing.

You are always in control.

The unconscious mind

The mind can be described as having two parts, conscious (what we are aware of) and unconscious (what we are not aware of). It is often described in terms of an iceberg where the 10 percent above the water represents the conscious mind (logical thoughts, intentional movements, information from the senses etc.) and the 90 percent below the water representing the unconscious. The unconscious mind is the part responsible for the automatic functioning of the mind and body. Physical responses such as changes in heart rate, behaviour such as habits and skills (e.g. smoking, driving a car) and things such as memories, emotions and beliefs are stored here. Hypnosis can be used to alter these unconscious processes in a way that is beneficial to you.

What is hypnotherapy?

Hypnotherapy is the use of hypnosis in a therapeutic and beneficial way for health and wellbeing. Hypnosis is intentionally induced by the patient or therapist to bring about beneficial changes. Because the unconscious mind is very receptive in hypnosis, these changes get absorbed into the workings of the mind and continue to be effective even after the patient 'wakes up' from the trance.

Why use hypnotherapy for the gut?

Hypnotherapy has been shown to be effective in treating the symptoms of Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) and other functional gut disorders such as non-cardiac chest pain and functional dyspepsia. It is recommended by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence (NICE) for the treatment of IBS, if diet, medication and lifestyle changes have been unsuccessful.

What is gut directed hypnotherapy?

This approach focuses on calming the digestive system to reduce symptoms and gain more control. It uses a framework developed by IBS Specialist, Professor PJ Whorwell who has extensively researched the effects of hypnotherapy on IBS and functional gut disorders. Research has shown that up to 70 percent of patients respond to treatment with the beneficial effects lasting for at least five years.

Although treatment in York follows this framework, it is individual and tailored to your needs and experiences.

Hypnotherapy is not a cure but can help to reduce symptoms and make them more manageable.

Hypnotherapy can help to:

- Reduce the sensitivity of the digestive system making it less likely to over-react and cause symptoms.
- Reduce severity and frequency of physical symptoms such as pain, bloating and urgency and regain a more regular bowel habit.
- Reduce stress and anxiety about your symptoms.
- Give you the time, opportunity and support to find the right approach for your health.
- Give you tools to use in everyday life to help you feel more in control.
- Help you feel more confident in managing your condition.

What will happen in a therapy session?

The nurse guides you into trance so there is no pressure on you to make anything happen. It is much better if you just relax and let go of any expectation or need to do anything.

You will always be able to hear the therapist's voice, but at times it may seem in the distance or you may not pay it much attention. You may be so absorbed in your inner imaginings that any outside noise or activity just fades into the background.

Sessions are usually very relaxing and peaceful.

Importantly you are always in control of the session and can open your eyes, move, or speak whenever you choose.

There is time before and after hypnosis to talk and discuss current issues, thoughts and experiences.

Outline of your treatment plan

We will invite you to an initial assessment appointment and then you will be offered up to six therapeutic sessions, each lasting about an hour.

The best outcomes are when someone works with the therapist, as this is a partnership to help your symptoms improve.

We will also encourage you to practise your skills in between sessions. This is a vital part of your course of treatment and ongoing self-care after sessions with us are completed. .

You can record your session on any electronic device, such as an iPad or mobile phone etc, so you can have this support during your own practise times outside of the sessions. **Never listen when driving or in any situation of responsibility.**

On your first session, the nurse will assess you more fully for hypnotherapy and you will be asked to sign consent to treatment form. There are two other forms recording how your symptoms are affecting you at the time of the first appointment and then after treatment to see how the treatment has helped you.

Your participation in this follow up is deeply appreciated and helps us to continue to provide a beneficial service.

If, during your treatment, you feel that your mood is lower or that hypnotherapy is not right for you, please discuss this with the therapist. We may recommend you discontinue with the treatment.

Who is the hypnotherapist?

The IBS Clinical Nurse Specialists are trained and experienced in hypnotherapy, including additional training in gut directed hypnotherapy, via the British Society of Clinical Hypnosis (BSCAH) and abide by their code of conduct and professional standards.

Further information

To read the research of Professor PJ Whorwell on hypnotherapy for IBS please see the website of:-

South Manchester Functional Bowel Service
www.ibs-care.org, telephone: 01619987070

For general information on hypnotherapy:-

British Society of Clinical and Academic Hypnosis
(BSCAH) www.bscah.com, telephone: 01262403103

Complementary and Natural Healthcare Council (CNHC)
www.cnhc.org.uk, telephone: 02031782199

[All websites Accessed August 2025]

Tell us what you think of this leaflet

We hope that you found this leaflet helpful. If you would like to tell us what you think, please contact:

Tracey Foy, IBS Nurse Specialist on 01904 724048.

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Teaching, training and research

Our Trust is committed to teaching, training and research to support the development of health and healthcare in our community. Healthcare students may observe consultations for this purpose. You can opt out if you do not want students to observe. We may also ask you if you would like to be involved in our research.

Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS)

PALS offers impartial advice and assistance to patients, their relatives, friends and carers. We can listen to feedback (positive or negative), answer questions and help resolve any concerns about Trust services.

PALS can be contacted on 01904 726262, or email yhs-tr.patientexperienceteam@nhs.net.

An answer phone is available out of hours.

Leaflets in alternative languages or formats

If you would like this information in a different format, including braille or easy read, or translated into a different language, please speak to a member of staff in the ward or department providing your care.

Patient Information Leaflets can be accessed via the Trust's Patient Information Leaflet website:
www.yorkhospitals.nhs.uk/your-visit/patient-information-leaflets/

Owner	Tracey Foy, IBS Nurse Specialist
Date first issued	April 2009
Review Date	August 2027
Version	4 (reissued August 2025)
Approved by	Dr P Kant Consultant Gastroenterologist
Document Reference	PIL628 v4.2
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