

If the drugs don't work...

Jul 12 2008 by **Abbie Wightwick**, Western Mail

From past life regression and faith healing to stopping smoking and learning to eat more slowly, hypnotherapy is fast becoming the buzzword in alternative therapy – you can even do a degree in it in Wales now. Abbie Wightwick looks into the eyes (not around the eyes) of the believers.

IMAGINE you have half a fresh, juicy lemon in your hand. Squeeze it and breathe in the tangy, citrus smell. Bring it up to your mouth and bite into the crunchy, cool flesh. Feel the fresh, sour juice hit your tongue. By now your mouth may be watering.

The lemon test, an example favoured by Cardiff-based hypnotherapist Richard Haggerty, is recognisable to anyone who has experienced the drooling sensation sparked by picturing favourite or sour foods.

It is one example of how the mind can affect the body, he says.

If eating isn't your thing then invoking a beautiful place may do the trick in transporting you elsewhere.



Studies have consistently shown a subject will not do anything against their core values when in trance

Above, Hypnotherapist Richard Haggerty

It is this ability to put the mind in a more relaxed state to aid physical health that is at the heart of the booming industry in healing and complementary therapy.

Richard Haggerty says hypnotherapy can complement mainstream medicine by tackling everything from irritable bowel syndrome to phobia and anxiety.

Some dentists also use it for pain relief. Although research is not conclusive, hypnotherapy has been shown to be so effective for some patients that they have had teeth removed with no other painkiller.

The British Medical Association acknowledges there is "immense interest" in alternative medicine among doctors in Wales and elsewhere.

Spokesman Paul Howard fears stage hypnotists have led people to believe their minds will be controlled by someone waving a watch in front of them.

"It has nothing to do with 'looking into your eyes' and more to do with looking into your behaviour," he insists.

"Hypnotherapy is commonly used to help with weight loss and stress, and it has also been

proven to be beneficial in smoking cessation and irritable bowel syndrome, but surprisingly it is probably most often used for psychological problems like anxiety and low self esteem.

"With smoking cessation, hypnotherapy in general has shown to be two and a half times more effective than nicotine replacement like nicotine gum or patches, and is five times more likely to succeed than will power alone.

"Hypnotherapy, rather than submerging the mind, is a way of helping people access it for themselves, according to those who use it."

Aleks Fowler, 32, a natural bodybuilder from Nantgarw, has regular hypnotherapy to boost her confidence before the World Championships in Belfast in August.

"I've been going for two months to get focused to win," she says.

"I've been competing for years and always get into the first three, but I want to win. The hypnotherapy makes me happy and confident. If you are stressed you can calm yourself down in just a few minutes. It's a whole approach to life.

"When I am in a trance I am

aware what's happening but am so relaxed. It's like sleeping while you're awake.

"I'm a personal trainer as well and this has a great place in sport. Your brain is like a computer. If you put in only positive messages your life can change."

Kerry Macdonald, 28, from Cardiff finally kicked her 12-year smoking habit after one one-hour session with hypnotherapist Richard Haggerty.

"I gave up exactly a year ago," she says with a smile, as if she cannot quite believe it herself.

"He put the idea into my mind that the smell would make me feel sick.

"When I finished I got into my car and drove off. At the traffic lights a man in a car beside me was smoking and the smell made me feel sick.

"I'm so glad I went for hypnotherapy. It's been the best thing. I had good reason to give up because I'm trying for a baby.

"I was told to picture myself at home with my new baby and people visiting. Then I had to picture myself coughing and going to the doctor and then having tests and being told I had three months to live and wouldn't see my baby grow up. "It put things in perspective. I don't think I would have been able to stop smoking without hypnosis, even though I wanted to. I had tried before and had lasted three months but always went back to it. I really just don't want to smoke now."

After years of dieting Helen Caudle who lives near Llantrisant finally tried hypnotherapy which she credits with helping her lose several stone.

Helen, 52, a customer services manager for Barratt Homes, says: "I'd never done anything like this before. The first time I felt self conscious. You see these stupid television programmes where people run

around and do things under hypnosis.

"At the end of the first session I came out feeling totally relaxed. You are conscious throughout and totally aware of everything that's going on. You aren't totally out of it.

"I was told to put my fork down between each mouthful. I'm a fast eater but in the third week of hypnotherapy I realised I had started putting my knife and fork down and going slower, but not deliberately.

"I'm not a gullible person. Normally my will power would have gone by now but I'm in my fourth week, I don't feel like I'm on a diet and I've lost 10lb without any effort.

"He suggested I'd refuse junk food and eat healthier. My weakness is cakes but I found I didn't want them.

"You need motivation but the hypnotherapy helps you keep it."

Her hypnotherapist, Richard Haggerty, believes the treatment has an important role in healthcare.

"Many studies have consistently shown a subject will not do anything against their core values when in trance. Since you are aware at all times, it is your choice to follow the suggestions," he says.

"We can reach parts of the subconscious under trance."

Former smokers like Kerry Macdonald reckon £65 to £90 for a session of hypnotherapy is not much when balanced against a 20-a-day habit costing nearly £50 a week.

"It was the best thing I ever did.

"It worked for me. What more can I say?" she asks with a grin.