



Willemsen, R., Vanderlinden, J., Deconinck, A., & Roseeuw, D. (Aug 2006). Hypnotherapeutic management of alopecia areata. *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*, 55(2), 233-237.

Results: In all, 21 patients, 9 with alopecia totalis or alopecia universalis and 12 with extensive AA, were analyzed during a 5-year period. After treatment, all patients had a significantly lower score for anxiety and depression. Scalp hair growth of 75% to 100% was seen in 12 patients after 3 to 8 sessions of hypnotherapy. Total growth occurred in 9 of these 12 patients, including 4 patients with alopecia universalis and 2 with ophiasis. In 5 patients, a significant relapse occurred.

Conclusion: Hypnotherapy may enhance the mental well-being of patients with AA and it may improve clinical outcome.

Hypnosis may help improve type of hair loss

NEW YORK (Reuters Health) - People with a patchy form of hair loss called alopecia areata might be helped with hypnosis, a preliminary study suggests.

“Hypnotherapy may enhance the mental well-being of patients with alopecia areata and it may improve clinical outcome,” Dr. Ria Willemsen, of Free University in Brussels, and colleagues write in the *Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology*.

Alopecia areata is an autoimmune disease characterized by sudden, recurrent hair loss in round spots from the scalp or any part of the body that has hair. Psychological factors, such as stressful events and psychotrauma have also been reported to play a role in the onset of the condition, but few studies have looked at the efficacy of psychological treatments.

Willemsen’s team explored hypnosis as a treatment for 21 individuals with extensive hair loss on 30 percent or more of their scalp that had lasted for at least three months. These patients, all of whom previously failed to respond to treatment with steroids, were followed for anywhere from six months to six years.

In most cases, the study participants received hypnosis along with some other medical treatment. During the hypnotherapy sessions, which took place once every three weeks, study participants were given various suggestions, such as to imagine the healing effects of the sun’s warmth on their scalp.

After treatment with a minimum of just three to four sessions of hypnotherapy, 12 patients experienced hair growth on at least 75 percent of their scalp, and nine of these 12 experienced total hair growth, Willemsen and colleagues report.

None of the patients reported any negative side effects due to the hypnotherapy. Yet, five study participants experienced a significant relapse during the follow-up period, four of whom experienced enough hair loss to return them to their pretreatment status, the researchers note.

In other findings, all of the patients for whom the pertinent data was analyzed scored lower on a measure of psychological symptoms, including phobia, hostility and interpersonal sensitivity, after their hypnotherapy treatment. They also scored lower on items that specifically looked at symptoms of anxiety and depression, study findings indicate.

Exactly how hypnosis might stimulate hair growth is unknown. In the past, researchers have shown that the hypnotic suggestion to improve blood flow in the scalp was linked to an actual increase in blood flow and skin temperature of the scalp. Willemsen and colleagues speculate that hypnosis may also indirectly lead to certain immune system changes.

Still, despite the findings, the researchers maintain that it “is still controversial” whether hypnosis is an effective treatment for alopecia areata. Since most patients received hypnotherapy as an add-on treatment, “it is not possible to evaluate how much of the changes and improvement in the hair growth was caused by the hypnotic interventions,” they write.

SOURCE: Journal of the American Academy of Dermatology, August 2006.