

The Power of Relaxation using Hypnosis: Geoff's Story Part 2



Reminder from *Geoff's Story Part 1*

Geoff suffered with asthma; his airways were narrowed and swollen and he was producing extra mucus. He was finding it difficult to breath and was coughing and wheezing when he breathed out and had shortness of breath.

This was a chronic condition which he'd had for decades however he was getting really anxious about not being able to breath and having catastrophic thoughts which were causing him to panic making his condition worse.

His attention was focused on not being able to breath and what would happen if he couldn't and was very distracting for him every day.

His anxiety about his asthma was causing him to overeat and drink excessively to cope with the stress which was putting on weight, and he wasn't going out as much as he used to for fear of having a panic or asthma attack in public.

He was finding it difficult to sleep and waking up during the night with his coughing and difficulty breathing.

His anxiety was all consuming and he was becoming intolerant of minor things he could usually cope with.

How did we help Geoff to relax using hypnosis?

After speaking with Geoff in some detail it was clear that his asthma wasn’t being well managed at the moment and he should go and check in with his prescribing doc.

Because his management wasn’t sufficient his symptoms were worse than ever, and this was triggering stress and anxiety for Geoff.

We formulated that if we were to manage the condition better by seeing his doctor it’s likely he would feel happier about being able to manage it better and the anxiety would ease.

However, in the meantime, we could reduce his anxiety by helping him to relax when or if he did have a coughing episode or felt the first signs of having an asthma attack to prevent it getting worse.

All of his symptoms could be either reduced at the cause i.e., better asthma management or at symptom level anxiety.

By helping Geoff to learn ways to proactively and reactively use hypnosis to manage his anxiety we were able to resource him with strategies and tools to stop the cycle of panic and prevent his asthma getting worse.

Positive thoughts – hypnosis helped to collapse his negative beliefs that something catastrophic was going to happen and that he could cope with this without panicking

Emotional regulation – hypnosis helped him to remain calm and rational without getting frustrated or angry which reduced the stress response

Focused attention – when people have breathing difficulties, focusing on the breathing can be counterproductive and only make things worse. We gave Geoff some other things he could easily focus on to distract his mind away from his breathing and helped him to relax

Engaging in positive behaviours – Because he was using some positive and effective strategies to relax himself and feel in control of his condition, Geoff had less need to rely on external resources for comfort and felt more confident going out more in public

Mindfulness – hypnosis helped Geoff to be aware of the first signs he was getting symptoms and to stop them in their tracks

Feeling in control – Being able to control his symptoms gave Geoff the confidence and ability to stay calm to reduce the stress on his mind and body

Managing Asthma – As well as getting better medical treatment, Geoff’s ability to stop his panic/anxiety cycle much early was an important step in managing his anxiety and preventing further asthma attacks.

How did hypnosis help Geoff to do all that?!

Geoff experienced several tailored hypnotic inductions, deepeners, and ego-strengthening suggestions over 3 sessions to help him relax:

Progressive relaxation – slowly and gradually work through each of the muscle groups in the body providing hypnotic suggestion to help them relax and Geoff to feel calm and relaxed. As each of the muscles relax, he allows his mind to relax too.

Favourite place - Geoff loved spending time in his garden, especially his veg garden. And this was always his favourite space that helped him to focus on something other than his condition and helped him to relax and lose track of time. He never felt anxiety while he was there. So, this was used as a hypnotic induction to send him to his imagination and feel relaxed just by imagining being there.

Guided imagery – His description of his favourite place was used to guide him mindfully around the garden, exploring in great detail using his senses to enrich his experience of being there.

On both guided imagery and favourite place inductions, we provided suggestions on how he could return to this safe and relaxing place anytime he needed to feel relaxed. By stopping what he was doing and pinching a finger and thumb together (an anchor) he could feel relaxed and calm and would take himself into his imaginary garden and spend a few minutes there until he was fully relaxed.

He said he used his pinch anchor and this imagery to get initially to sleep and back to sleep during the night when he woke up. This helped to manage any early thoughts that might contribute to him having a panic or asthma attack. He also used these techniques to prevent negative thoughts appearing before he went out whenever any early signs of apprehensions about being in public appeared, and also when he was home and negative thoughts were appearing around his condition to distract his thoughts away from reaching for food or drink unnecessarily.

We avoided using breathing techniques to prevent any anxiety thoughts or feelings reappearing.