



Healing the Whole Person

Hypnotherapy as an aid in Cancer Treatment and Recovery

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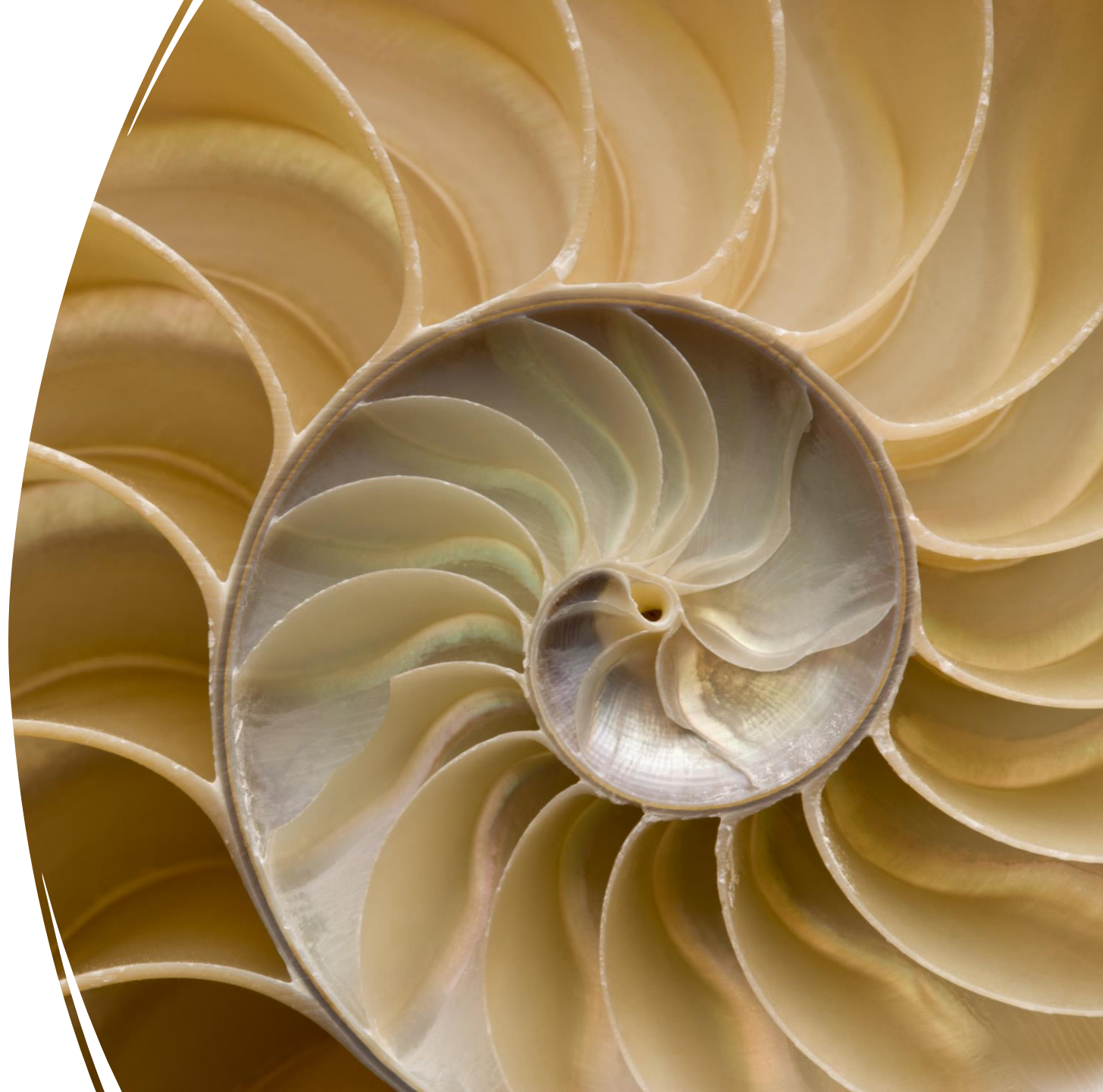
What is hypnosis?

Definition:

Hypnosis is a state of intense focus and deep relaxation while your mind becomes more open to positive suggestions.

It has 3 parts:

1. Focused attention
2. Deep relaxation
3. Heightened suggestibility

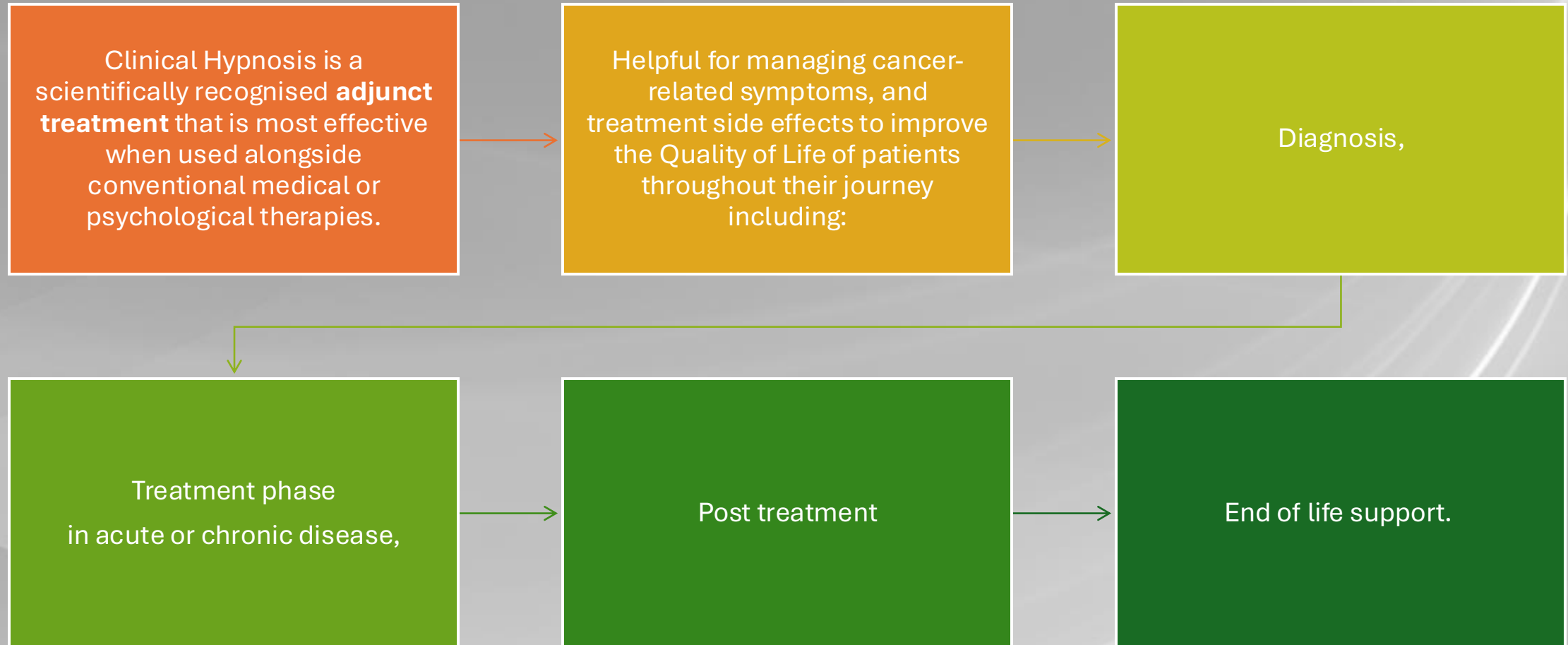


Common myths of Hypnosis

Will I lose control? You are always in control and can't be forced to do anything against your will.

Will I be unconscious? No, you remain conscious throughout.

Hypnosis is a complementary treatment



Hypnosis Effectiveness for Cancer Symptom Management

| Symptom | Effectiveness Level | Clinical Observations & Study Findings |
|----------|----------------------|--|
| Pain | High | Consistently shown to reduce procedural-related pain (e.g., biopsies, bone marrow aspirations) and chronic cancer pain. Often reduces the need for pain medication . |
| Anxiety | High | Significant immediate and sustained reductions in anxiety found in meta-analyses of over 20 studies. Particularly effective for procedure-related distress in paediatric patients. |
| Nausea | Moderate to High | Strongly effective for anticipatory nausea (nausea triggered by the environment before treatment starts). Evidence for post-chemotherapy nausea is less robust but still promising. |
| Sleep | Moderate | Shown to improve insomnia and general sleep quality in clinical trials, often as part of a recorded intervention . Some meta-analyses call for more rigorous RCTs in terminally ill populations. |
| Phobias | Specific Application | While general hypnosis is used for fears/phobias, cancer-specific studies often focus on needle phobia or claustrophobia (related to MRI/radiotherapy), showing clinical success in reducing avoidance behaviours. |
| Appetite | Low/Emerging | There is currently a dearth of high-quality RCTs specifically measuring appetite in cancer patients. Anecdotal and case report evidence suggest it may help with secondary loss of appetite caused by nausea or depression. |

Key Considerations



**Therapist vs.
Self-Hypnosis**

Hypnotisability

Safety

My Story

Chronic Lymphocytic Leukaemia

Chemotherapy

Bone Marrow Transplant



My Over-Protective Bodyguard

- Nausea
- What happened?
- According to the Cancer Council (NSW), “Hypnotherapy can reduce the automatic stress responses triggered by medical appointments and procedures”.

The same system that saves us from a tiger can trap us in a waiting room.

- **The fight or flight response** is like a bodyguard. It's only job is to look for threats.
- The **benefit** is that it keeps us safe in genuine emergencies.
- The **glitch** is that the nervous system can't always tell the difference between a physical threat and a **psychological threat**.
- The **result** is that it can be like an **over-protective bodyguard**.
- **In Cancer Care: Distress isn't failure**, it's a physiological response. Sometimes a diagnosis and treatment can put the body in a state of Fight or Flight. It's like a permanent alarm signal going off.





The Parasympathetic Nervous System

This is your **Rest and Digest** system. It is responsible for healing, recovery, and calm.

- **When it turns on:** When you feel safe, relaxed, or deeply focused.

- **What it does:** It slows your heart rate, deepens your breathing, and restarts "maintenance" functions like digestion and immune repair.

- **In Cancer Care:** This is the state where your body does its best **healing**.

How Hypnosis Bridges the Two

The goal of hypnotherapy is to manually "**flip the switch**" from the Sympathetic (stress) to the Parasympathetic (calm).



HEALTHWATCH

HYPNOSIS FOR CANCER

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Case example: Sarah

- De-identified
- Sarah was diagnosed with Multiple Myeloma at age 52. She was referred to me to address Pain and Sleep.
- She described she had two **Pains** – one was Bone Pain in her hips and the other was Nerve Pain down her legs.
- **Sleep** was difficult due to pain and frustration.



Pain

- Pain is fundamentally **subjective**; It is a combination of a physical signal to the brain ***and how the brain interprets it***
- This is why two people can undergo the identical cancer treatment yet report vastly different pain levels

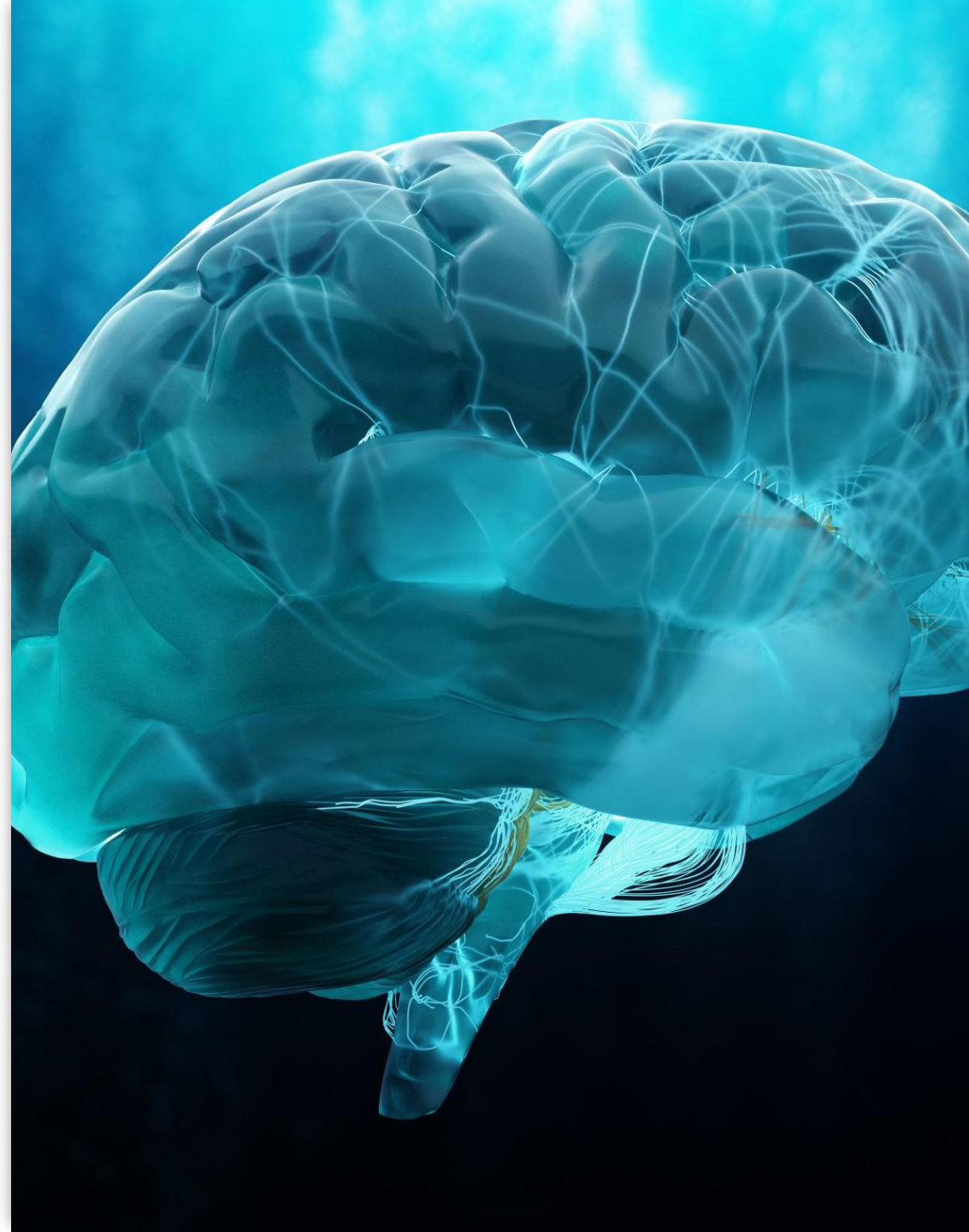
Individual factors influencing Pain

- **Total Pain** is used for any person experiencing pain, and it is particularly useful for people during 'End of Life' Care.
- **Past Experience:** Previous poorly managed pain can "prime" the nervous system, making it more sensitive to new pain (central sensitisation).
- **Meaning of Pain:** If a patient views pain as a sign that their cancer is progressing, it often feels more intense and distressing than pain they view as a temporary side effect of healing.
- **Coping Mechanisms:** Individuals with high "pain catastrophising" (expecting the worst) tend to experience higher pain levels than those with active coping strategies.



Why Hypnosis Works Here

- Hypnosis is effective precisely because it addresses pain as an **individual experience**. Rather than just blocking a nerve, it helps the brain "re-interpret" the signal.
- **Interrupting the Feedback Loop:** In conditions like Cancer-related pain, the brain can become hyper-vigilant to body signals. Hypnosis acts as a "**noise-cancelling headphone**" for the brain, lowering the volume of these internal distress signals.



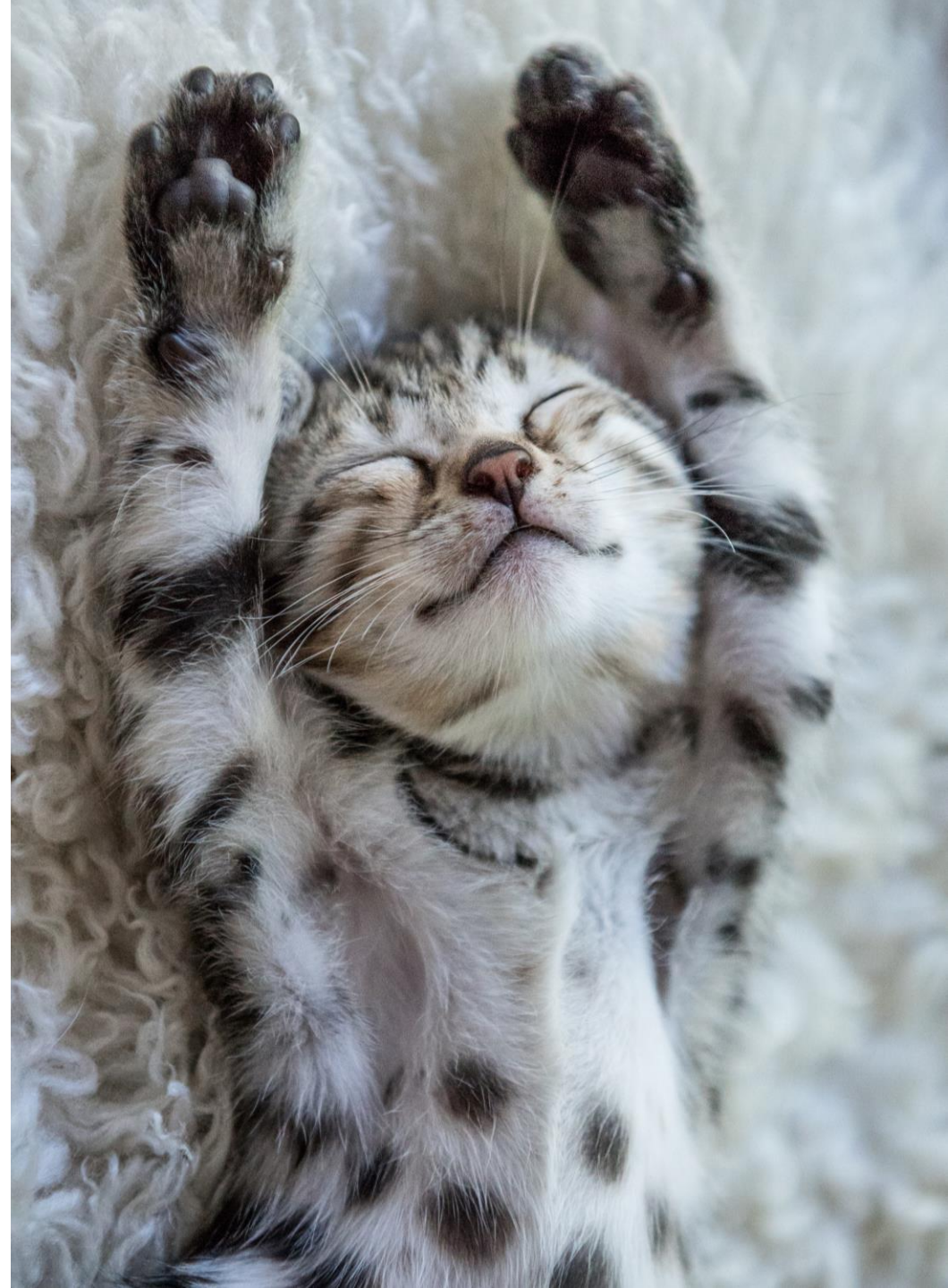
Sarah's Plan

- For Sarah, managing symptoms like bone pain and insomnia involves:
- Using hypnotherapy to reshape how the brain perceives pain and discomfort
- Calming and soothing her hyper-alert nervous system.
- Relaxation techniques to improve her sleep



Techniques to Improve Sleep

- Hypnotherapy helps break the "vicious cycle" where pain keeps the body too tense for sleep, and lack of sleep increases pain sensitivity.
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR):** Sarah was guided to release tension starting from her toes up to her head.
- **The "Cloud" Metaphor:** to release pains and worries
- **Hypnosis with Cognitive Therapy:** Reducing the pressure of sleep.
- **Sleep Hygiene:** addressing behavioural changes not conducive to sleep.



Targeted Techniques for Pain Relief

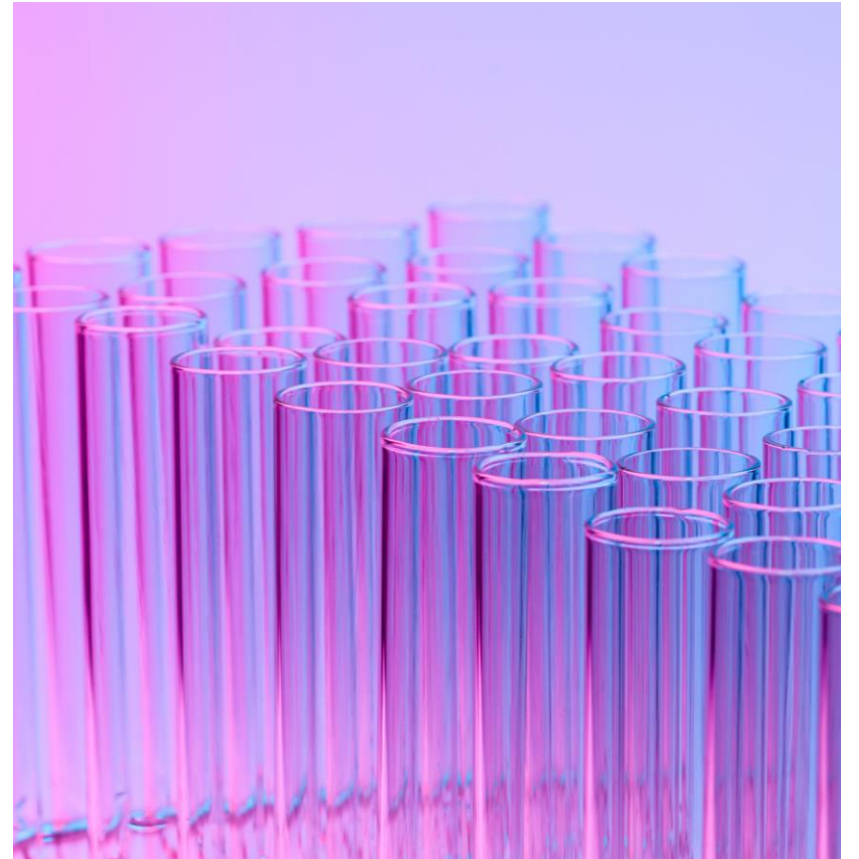
For her Bone Pain

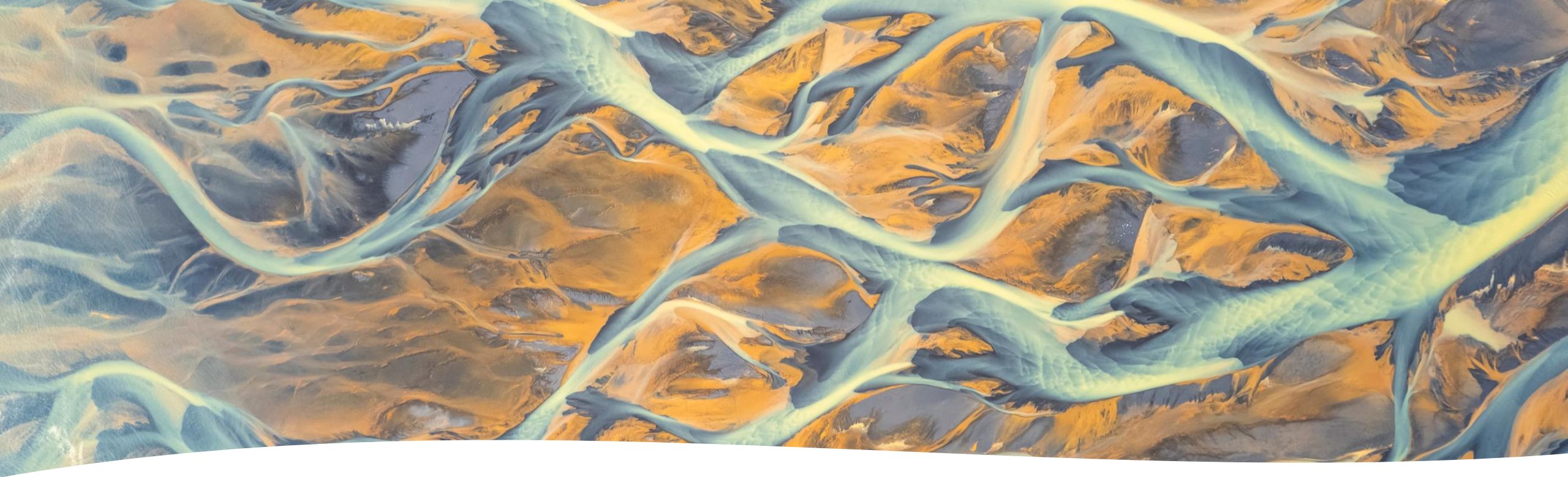
- **Re-focusing Attention:** By directing attention away from the pain and towards positive, engaging imagery (e.g., a "pleasant place"), the brain becomes less focused on processing pain signals.



Sarah's response

- Sarah loved the **Progressive Muscle Relaxation** and became aware that she was holding tension in many parts of her body.
- She also found it very helpful to not put so much pressure on herself to **sleep** as soon as she did that, she was able to drift off easier. She reported significantly less fatigue.
- In addressing her pain, Sarah enjoyed her beach scene. She also began doing this recording before medical appointments as a way to relax.
- She found that the hypnosis was helpful for her hip pain but she wasn't finding the nerve pain was reducing. She described it as sudden and sharp shooting pains that took her out of relaxation





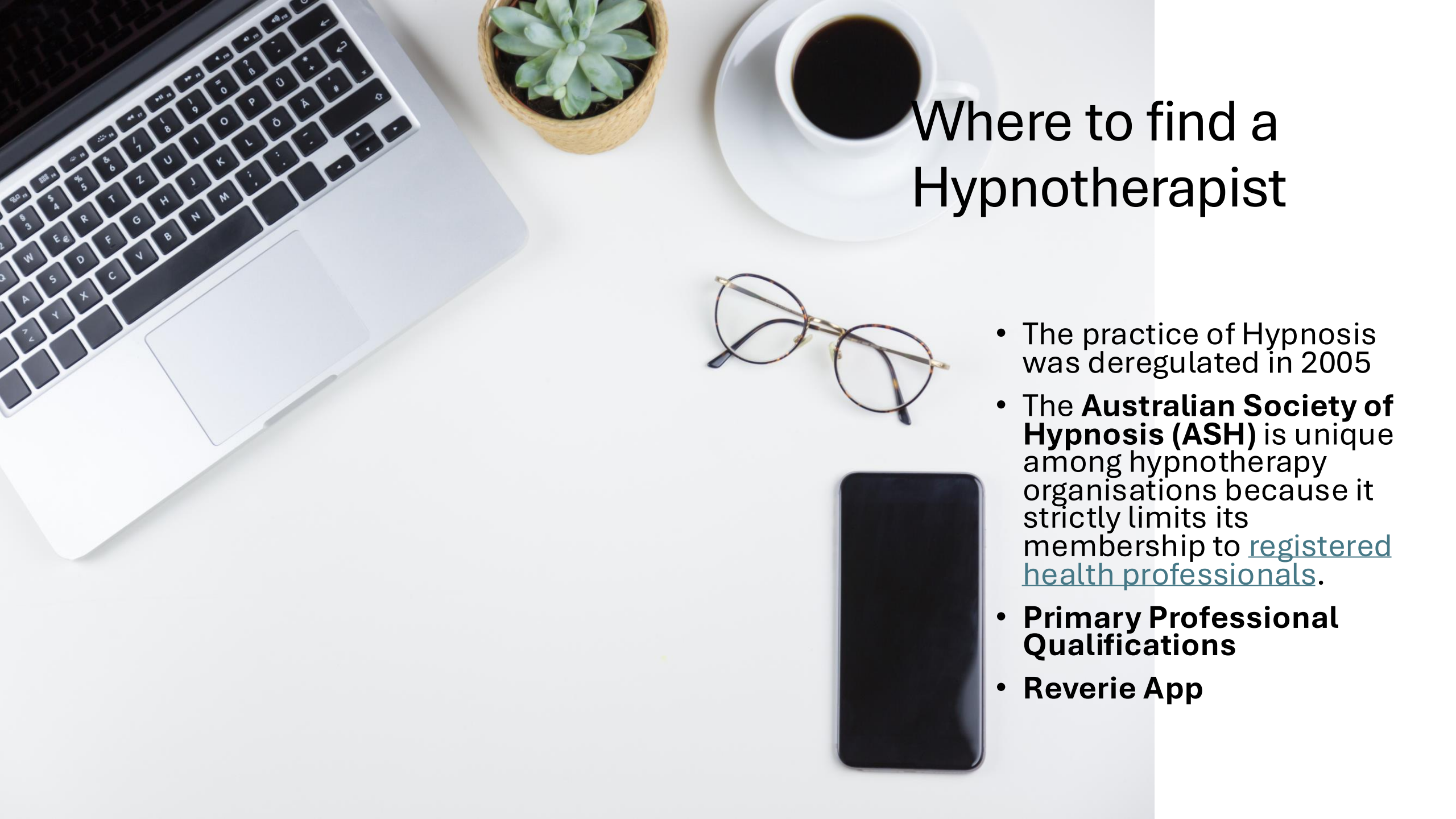
Sarah's Nerve Pain

- **Sensory Modification:** Through suggestions, individuals can transform the sensation of pain into something more comfortable. such as turning a "burning" sensation into a "cool" or "numb" feeling.
- **"Filtering" Pain:** Imagery is used to filter out the distressing "hurt" from the pain, transforming it into a neutral sensation like pressure or warmth



Foot grounding exercise

- Can be used for general relaxation, or it can be used in acute settings where your anxiety or stress levels may spike. Or to support relaxation before sleep.
- If you like it, I suggest you ask your support person or family member to remind you to do it.

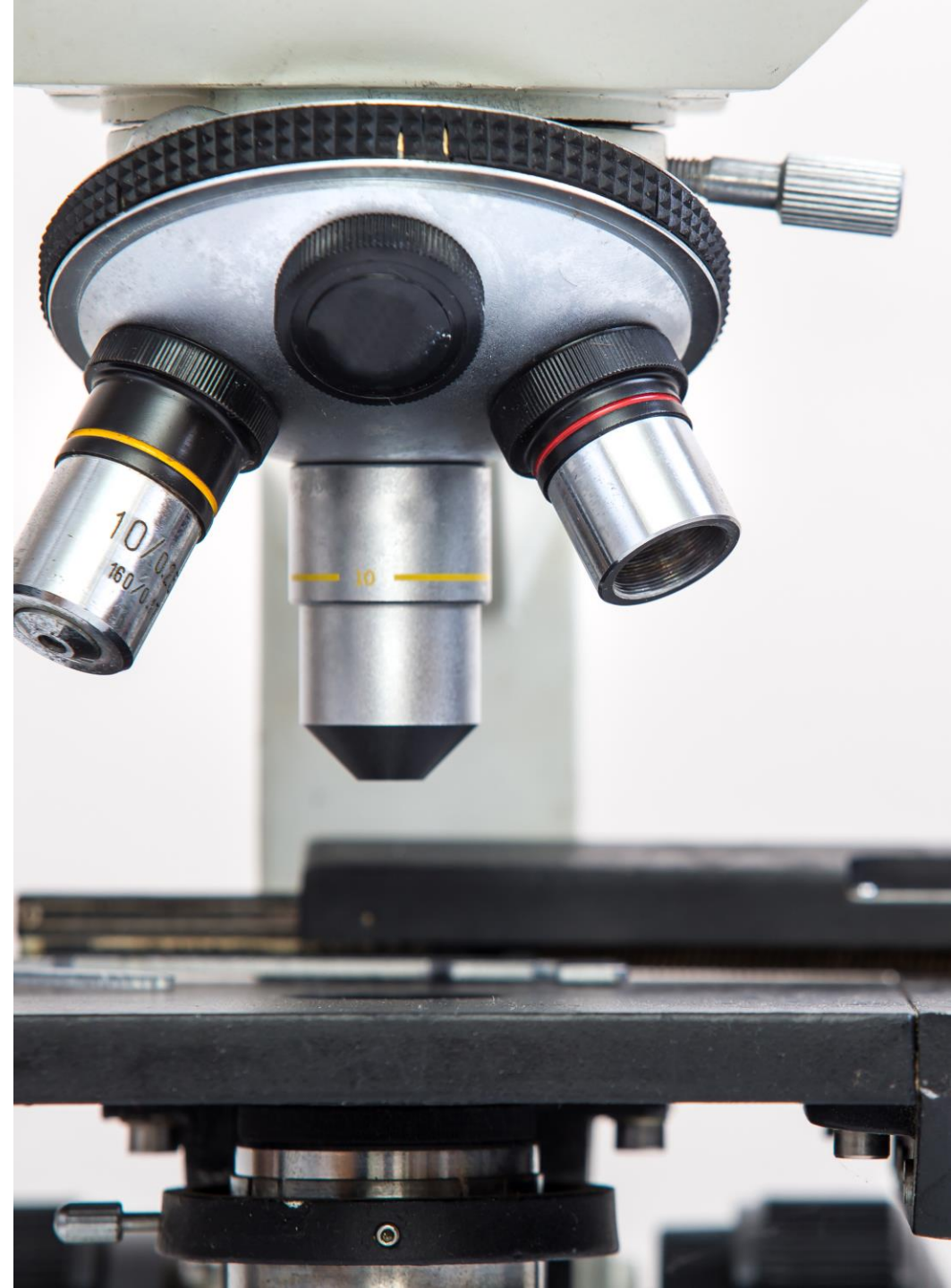


Where to find a Hypnotherapist

- The practice of Hypnosis was deregulated in 2005
- The **Australian Society of Hypnosis (ASH)** is unique among hypnotherapy organisations because it strictly limits its membership to [registered health professionals](#).
- **Primary Professional Qualifications**
- **Reverie App**

Research

- **Major Research Databases**
- **PubMed/MEDLINE:** Search for "hypnosis AND cancer" or "hypnotherapy AND neoplasms" to find peer-reviewed studies. Many articles on PubMed Central (PMC) are free to access.
- **ScienceDirect:** Contains qualitative and quantitative research, such as studies on patient perceptions of hypnotherapy.
- **Ecru.edu.au:** A source for Australian-based research on hypnotherapy in patient care
- **Cancer Council (Australia):** Provides accessible summaries of how hypnotherapy can be used as a complementary therapy



Summary

Hypnosis is a powerful way to reclaim the driver's seat during any phase of your cancer journey

Hypnosis enables you to create a mental sanctuary, you have the power to shift your internal state whether you're in a waiting room or under a scanning machine

Well-being isn't just the absence of pain, it is the presence of calm and hope. Your spirit and emotional self need as much care as your cells.

Questions and comments



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