

THE EFFECT OF HYPNOSIS ON PUTTING PERFORMANCE IN SENIOR GOLFERS

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Hypnosis has been advocated as means of enhancing performance in sports (Carlstedt, 2004; Orlick, 1990; Unestahl, 1995). Pates and associates initiated a series of studies that examined its effectiveness in enhancing performance in different sports and found it led to improved performance on free throw and jump shooting in basketball (Pates et al, 2001), serving in badminton (Pates et al, 2002) and in chipping and putting accuracy in golf (Pates et al, 2000, 2002). In the putting study the participants were 21 years old and all reported that the intervention was useful in keeping them focussed. While concentration and focus are regarded as essential to success in all sports, this is particularly the case in golf. Since these cognitive areas are known to decline with aging (Crook, 1993), the purpose of this study was to determine whether the findings in relation to putting could be replicated in senior golfers. The study was similar to the Pates et al (2002) study in that it involved five participants. There were three men and two women aged 58 - 69 with a mean age of 65.4. All were experienced golfers with handicaps ranging from 12 to 38 and a mean of 23. The handicaps of the 21 year old males in the Pates study ranged from 11 to 24. The task and design of the two studies were also similar. Using a single subjects design (Hrycaiko and Martin, 1996) the putting accuracy of the participants was assessed by having them try fifty 13 foot putts during the baseline phase. This was followed by the intervention involving hypnotic induction, hypnotic regression and the use of a trigger control procedure. Re-testing was done a week later.

The results indicated that all five seniors increased their mean putting performance from the baseline to the intervention phase of testing. Each increased their percentage of successful putts with increases ranging from 7 % to 250 % and showing a direct relationship to their handicaps (i.e., the higher the handicap the greater the improvement). The distance that the ball stopped from the hole on missed putts also showed improved performance by the group. As in the Pates study, the average distance score dropped from the first to second testing session. In this instance it was an average of 8.1cm closer to the hole which is marginally less than the 9.4cm shown by the seniors' younger counterparts.

Like the Pates study, the intervention in this study involved establishing a post-hypnotic trigger during hypnosis. It was expected that use of the trigger by the participants during re-testing would help them to be more focussed and thereby improve their putting accuracy. The trigger appeared to have this effect in that each senior indicated that they were more focussed while putting during the second session than during the first.

The findings of this study are consistent with others that have demonstrated the performance enhancing effects of hypnosis in sports. They also suggests that hypnosis may be beneficial to seniors in helping to override the aging-related decline in one's ability to maintain focus. Further exploration is warranted to determine whether the beneficial effects noted in this study also occur in relation to other athletic activities involving seniors and whether hypnosis would help to alter the steep decline that is seen in the performance of senior athletes that begins in their 75 th year (Wright, 2005).

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