

# Good Health

November 2010 \$6.95 INC GST

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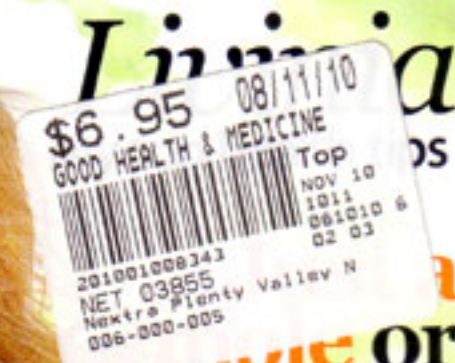
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# virtual therapy

*how it works for you*

If you are desperate to lose weight, manage pain or quit smoking, the key might be to tap into a virtual world. By Joanna Hall

**M**ore than a decade ago in the hit movie *The Matrix*, Keanu Reeves' character plugs into a virtual reality world to fight evil by means of an elaborate software program.

In recent years, scientists have found that similar technology can be effective in treating a gamut of disorders from stress to addictions. Called virtual reality therapy (VRT), it focuses on the subconscious mind by placing a person temporarily in a virtual world to treat their problems.

In the case of a spider phobia, for example, a patient is hooked up to a computer using a head-mounted display with goggles and earphones so they 'experience' the various stimuli related to their phobia. The idea is to gradually desensitise them to spiders so they can control their responses.

## From VRT to VRH

In Australia, VRT has been taken a step further and is combined with a variety of other therapies – hypnotherapy, subliminal messaging, guided imagery and actual counselling. Sometimes called virtual reality hypnosis, or VRH, it was created and developed by Dr Colin Carbis, a hypnotherapy and psychotherapy expert.

So how does it differ from VRT? "VRH works with both your conscious and subconscious mind," explains Carbis. "It advances the development of new neurological pathways in your brain, so that you are able to make better choices, and change how you react to events in your life. It helps to reprogram your thinking and the reason you do

things, instead of just taking care of the symptoms."

## All hooked up

Shirley Smith, a psychotherapist and VRH practitioner, describes a typical first session. "It would involve setting goals, identifying the issues surrounding your problem, and discussing emotional triggers," she says. "Then the patient would spend about 40 minutes hooked up to the computer."

The patient puts on a head-mounted display unit that is attached to a computer. The earphones and eye goggles are designed to block out external distractions and deliver the hypnosis, putting you into a virtual world. First, a deep state of relaxation is induced using images and sound; inspirational pictures of



nature such as a waterfall, accompanied by a soothing voice encouraging relaxation. Then, depending on what they are being treated for, the patient will be shown a series of images, and hear a voice making positive suggestions.

If you are going through the 'Motivate To Exercise' program, for example, you will see images of people of all body shapes being active. You can also interact with the program, lifting actual hand weights when prompted. This implants behaviour into the brain and also the muscles.

According to Smith, the programs are very specific.

"With weight loss, for example, if a person tends to reach for unhealthy food when they are stressed, we aim to reprogram those triggers and how they respond to them using sound and visual imagery," she says. "VRH is all about making a profound lifestyle change, changing the inner fabric of your brain, emotions, thinking and behaviours. But the key is that you have to work on these elements all together, and that's why this therapy is so effective."

### Unlocking the power

Smith says sessions run from 75 to 90 minutes and most people would see results after 10 visits. She says people respond positively because it is a safe, drug-free way to tackle problems. "VRH creates a balance between the conscious desire for change, and the deep-rooted beliefs held in the subconscious mind that ultimately rule our lives," says Smith. "This alignment unlocks the power within all of us, and sets us free to pursue our life goals."

### VRH CAN HELP WITH

Acute and post-traumatic stress disorders

Addictions

Anxiety

Depression

Handling life changes

Latent viral infections (persistent virus)

Pain management

Panic attacks

Performance anxiety

Psycho-immunology (psychological effects on the immune system)

Psycho-oncology issues (psychological effects of cancer treatments)

Psychosomatic disorders

Self-image

Sleep disorders

Smoking

Stress

Weight control

**More information** For further details on VRH, or to find a practitioner near you, visit [www.virtualmedicine.com.au](http://www.virtualmedicine.com.au).