

answer to losing weight?

GLENN DEARING FOR THE TIMES



Sarah Vine relaxes on the sofa while Marion Shirran begins the hypnosis

3 Spend 15 minutes each day in a quiet place where you are not going to be disturbed. First have a good long look at your picture. Study it and remind yourself about your small waist, your flat tummy, your narrow hips and thighs. Close your eyes and breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth about 12-13 times. Work from the top of your head down to your toes. Relax your scalp, head, face, neck, shoulders and so on. Do it very slowly. Work down your whole body. When you get to your toes you should be really relaxed. It should take about seven minutes.

4 When you've relaxed your whole body imagine yourself as your picture. It could be in a part of the

world where you'd love to be; say Venice. You look stunning. Imagine yourself walking across a piazza with amazing confidence. All the heads are turning in admiration. Luxuriate in how good this feels.

5 Obey the three golden rules of visualisation. Do it regularly — once a day until you have gained your target weight, then twice a week to maintain. Don't fall asleep while you're doing it. And see yourself as the size you want to be, not the size you are now. Look at your visualisation tool every time.

Hypnodiet by Susan Hepburn is published by Piatkus, £10.99

ing meticulously on recording every answer. We watch a video of someone having an actual gastric band operation and she shows me a series of case studies about the men and women who have made the pilgrimage to their Spanish clinic, now reborn as happy, smiling success stories.

After a couple of hours, she hypnotises me: I am walking in a beautiful garden, down some steps, on to a beach; I am visualising myself as a perfect size 12 (my request), wafting around in beautiful clothes. (I think the wafting part is mine; she didn't actually say wafting, but I've always wanted to be the sort of person who wafts, and it's my visualisation, so I shall waft if I want to.) I'm just about to transform into Angelina Jolie when, dammit, I fall asleep. The next thing I know I'm climbing up those stairs again and I am — as I believe the saying goes — “back in the room”.

That evening I notice several things. I am chewing my food for longer, I put my knife and fork down between mouthfuls and I leave some food on my plate.

The next day I'm back for my second session. This is with Martin, who is, it turns out, going to ask me some tough questions. I don't enjoy this much: I'm afraid I respond to confrontation in a distinctly combative manner and, frankly, Martin gets my back up. Bad, bad cop: I am crotchety and restless. Luckily, Marion is on hand to hypnotise me afterwards, and I sink gratefully back into the Angelina-Jolie-on-the-beach scene.

Day three and it's the morning of my “operation”. I am ready; I am even looking forward to it. Marion and I talk through the process and she shows me an actual gastric band. Together, we visualise the golf-ball sized stomach, and she shows me a large pot of actual fat. She pulls two large, yellow bands of blubber out of a bag. They wobble around in my hand like something irksome from *Doctor Who*. This, I think, as the larger of the two sweats gently in my lap, represents my stomach. I think of the lard clogging up my arteries, insulating my internal organs. It has to go.

The hypnosis starts in the usual way. Garden, steps, beach, wafting. Then the sounds of the shore fade away to be replaced by the sounds of a hospital. I can hear people talking quietly in the background; Marion is guiding me through the process. I am in an operating theatre, I am relaxed and happy, I want to do this, I am in safe hands, here is the nurse, here is the anaesthetic. I feel — properly feel — something warm entering my veins. I experience the fuzz of the anaesthetic. And then, dear reader, I have a panic attack.

It is testimony to the power of hypnosis — and to Marion's skill — that I had to stop the session. I just couldn't go through with it: the whole thing was so realistic, that it brought back rushing memories of previous operations. One, a little more than a year ago, for a badly broken arm: very painful, and necessitating a lot of morphine, which makes me feel violently sick. Two years ago, and a leaky appendix; seven years ago, and an emergency Caesarean.

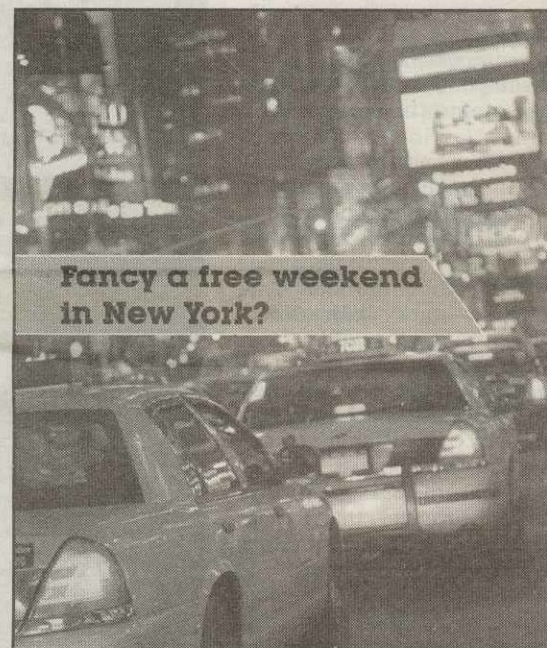
In particular, the sticky sensation of morphine, that horrible drowsiness and sense of confusion made me feel sick and afraid. Poor Marion. Out of 3,000 patients, I had to be the one to freak out. Her reaction could not have been more professional. She calmed me down, gave me a drink of water and we chatted through my response. As I began to feel better, I suggested we try

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”

again; she didn't think it was wise. Instead we reverted to the usual wafty beach scene, me descending happily through the layers of my consciousness to a happy sunbed and a size-12 bathing suit. If I remember rightly, Angelina was rather jealous.

The odd thing is that, even without the benefit of the operation, I think it has made a difference. I do feel fuller quicker, and I am more mindful of what I eat. I have lost a bit of weight; not much, but it's only been a couple of weeks. Marion has uploaded my last session to her website and I listen to it on my iPod. I'm afraid I do not believe I have a golf-ball sized stomach, but in the end, I don't think that really matters. What matters is that my head has finally struck up a constructive relationship with my stomach. With any luck, this time it will last.

For further information 020-3468 7876, Shirrans' Solution - The Gastric Mind Band (AuthorHouse, £12.50)



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