



# 10 Ways to Alter Your Consciousness Without Drugs

by **randofa** on September 29, 2011

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## Intro: 10 Ways to Alter Your Consciousness Without Drugs

I'm typically not one for altered states of consciousness. I don't do drugs. I've never been drunk. In fact, the only time I can claim to have been synthetically high was when, against my will, I was injected with Fentanyl moments before being put under for surgery (and that high was not a pleasant experience). So, when I purchased a book [Get High Now \(without drugs\)](#) at a book sale, many of my friends and loved ones thought it extremely peculiar. When I set out to make an Instructable along the same theme, they felt I had perhaps come unhinged.

This whole endeavor is highly out of character for me. I am not one to seek out altered states of consciousness, and everyone seemed plain confused as to why I suddenly wanted to (and without drugs, no less). Some friends wanted to know if this meant I would go out drinking with them now. Others simply wanted to know who I was, where I came from, and what I did with the real Randy. All of that said, I am not particularly certain what made all of this resonate with me so strongly, but I found it compelling enough to give it a try.

Collected here are a number of techniques for altering your consciousness. All of these have been vetted by myself and found to be effective for me on some level. That means that I did try and reject a few consciousness altering exercises that might work for others. The most notable rejection was transcendental meditation. I could not get it to do much of anything for me other than make my legs stiff. Really, the only thing I found transcendental meditation good for was striking a nice pose for the main image of this Instructable.

While none of these 10 approaches are as consciousness-altering as being injected with Fentanyl, I can say that they will all make you perceive the world in alternative ways.



### Step 1: Sleep Deprivation

The body and mind need rest in order to operate at peak performance. When the body and mind do not get the required amounts of rest time, they start doing weird things. Envision for a moment a talking children's toy with dying batteries. The voice slows down and distorts and the moving parts twitch helplessly as they try in vain to move. In some way, this is a good metaphor for sleep deprivation.

If you have ever gone longer than twenty four hours without sleep, chances are that you experienced some form of altered state as a result of sleep deprivation. In fact, the more days that you go without sleeping, the more dramatic the altered state becomes. A small sample of things that you might expect to experience while sleep deprived include strange social interactions, a slowing of cognitive ability, and a distorted sense of self.

My experience:

The longest that I have stayed awake has been three and a half days. By the middle of the third day I was trying to talk to people, but primarily mumbling incoherently to myself. In turn, people would talk to me and I would answer, but not know what I was saying. There was a strange feeling of detachment from my surroundings. My reaction time slowed down and my actions were lethargic. I was there, but not there. Sometimes I would start doing things and not know why. It was as if everything - even my most immediate concerns - were happening in my periphery.

I finally found myself on the train on my way home from work. I kept falling asleep standing up. I tried to combat this by sitting down for a few minutes and then standing up for a few more minutes. I think I might have also been mumbling to myself to stay awake, but I can't fully remember. At the point, it was hard for me to tell what I was doing. After about eighty-five hours of being awake, I managed to make the seemingly eternal 3-block trek home from the train station. When I finally made it home, I laid down in bed, and passed out for a solid eighteen hours. The whole experience was rather unsettling, but definitely interesting.



## Step 2: Binaural Beats

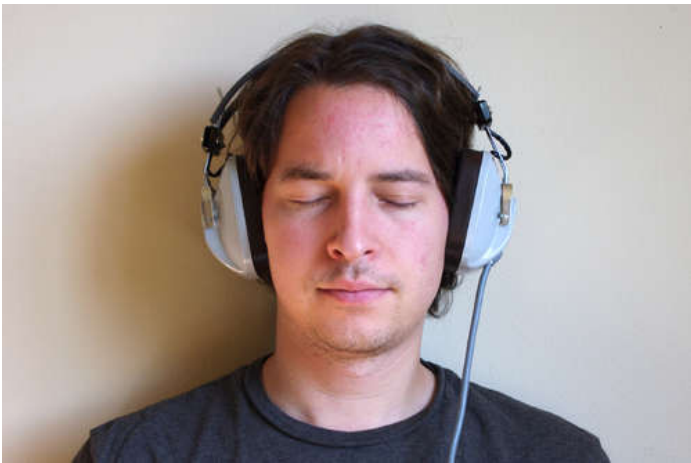
Binaural beats are created by playing two loud tones in each ear that are very close in frequency. The brain processes this by filling in the difference and creating a third tone that is roughly the difference of the two. For instance, if you play a 400 Hz tone in one ear and 410 Hz tone in the other, your brain will create a binaural tone of 10 Hz. The theory behind this is that you can create specific audio clips that when played in your ears will stimulate your brain to produce a tone that corresponds with one of the naturally occurring brain states.

The five cognitive states that your brain operates within are Gamma (>40 Hz), Beta (13 - 39 Hz), Alpha (7 - 13 Hz), Theta (4 - 7 Hz) and Delta (<4 Hz). As the frequencies decrease, cognitive focus and alertness decrease, and you start moving into more meditative states, until you finally find yourself in deep delta sleep. There are a ton of websites online with different sound clips which produce tones in all of the mental states (except gamma, as the frequencies that create binaural beats can't be greater than 30 Hz apart). By listening to different audio clips optimized for different brain states, it is possible to alter your consciousness.

My experience:

I went into this experiment with expectation that this was a bunch of new age hippie nonsense and wouldn't result in much, but to my surprise, I must say that listening to this audio does in fact have an effect on my conscious states. Aside from the immediately obvious phantom third tone echoing throughout my head, I experienced a change in mood depending on which tone was being played. When I listened to an alpha-targeted binaural beat for a few minutes I started to feel very calm. And, when I listen to a beta-targeted clip, I became somewhat restless and agitated.

To keep things interesting, I did not research exactly what the different clips were supposed to do prior to listening to them, but upon looking them up later, most of them induced a feeling in line with that particular brain state. That said, I feel that there is something more to these clips than merely being a pure placebo effect.



## Step 3: Hypnagogic Induction

Having just touched upon different brain states, hypnagogic induction is an exercise to maintain a constant theta state. This is not something that is typically easily accomplished as the theta state tends to be a transitory state between an alert (beta) state and deep sleep (delta).

The goal of this exercise is to not allow the brain to enter the delta state and stay in the Theta state for as long as possible. This is easily accomplished by sticking an arm up in the air while you are trying to go to sleep. When your body slips out of consciousness, your arm should drop down and wake you enough for you to put your arm back in the air. Ideally, the exercise would end by waking up and writing down some of the thoughts you had while you were semi-lucid and your mind was wandering. However, often you just end up falling asleep.

My experience:

The first time I tried this, I was only able to maintain that state for a few moments before my arm dropped. The more that I tried, the longer that I was able to maintain this state. On a typical night I would try to do about five to ten repetitions of raising and dropping my arm. I found that more often than not I fell to sleep instead of waking myself back up to reflect on my thoughts. The first few times I managed to wake I had trouble recalling what it was that I had been thinking about. After a while this got a little bit easier, but I still had some trouble remembering all that had occurred in mind. While this mental state is interesting to experience, and this trick for maintaining it is quite fun, I can't say that I got much of value out of doing this.



#### Step 4: Self-Hypnotism

I once saw a bunch of lobsters get hypnotized and stood upright on their heads. This was pretty cool, but a bit disturbing to watch (especially since they were then boiled alive). Ever since, the idea of being hypnotized by anyone - even myself - kind of makes me uneasy. I am not sure whether it is an aversion to trance states, or whether I simply am afraid of being boiled alive. Perhaps it is both. Any which way, the idea of inducing myself into a deep disconnected hyper-suggestive state is mildly unnerving. Yet, tons of people claim this works, so I had to at least give it a go. What I found was that it does indeed work and is rather kind of cool. I have yet to see any long term effects from doing it, but I can definitely put myself in a mild trance state.

My experience:

There are a ton of different approaches for self-hypnotism, but they are all basically along the same lines. I tried a few and then found an approach that worked for me that is a synthesis of about three or four other routines.

I start by creating a mantra of something private about myself that I would like to change. I write this down as to internalize it and set it aside. I now recline in a comfortable chair. I close my eyes and breathe deeply. I tense my body for a few seconds and then release. Working my way from my head down, I tell myself that I am relaxing my muscles (shoulders, arms, chest, etc.). Continuing to breathe deep I feel all of my body start to very slowly relax and sink. I am now in a dark deep cave. There is a pool of water in the cave. I step in and continue walking down deeper. I tell myself that the water is now up to my ankles, knees, waist, etc. I feel a tingling rising throughout my body as I go deeper and deeper. Finally, I am completely underwater and floating in an infinitely dark pool.

I tell myself that I am completely relaxed. I feel as though I am sinking deeper and deeper. I am now floating in a deep calm void. I repeat the mantra I wrote down earlier to myself. After some time I will start to emerge from this place back into the pool. I will slowly rise out of the pool. First my head, then my shoulders, then my waist, etc. Finally, I will step out of the pool and walk out of the cave. I slowly open my eyes and amazingly about twenty minutes have past.

Against all personal skepticism, I have induced myself into a trance and risen out of it. It was not merely a matter of relaxing myself, but I felt myself actually transition into a trance state. It was as though I sunk into the back of my head, into the farthest reaches of my brain. I can't really explain it, but it was very cool. As to whether or not the mantra I brought into the trances with me will have any long term effect, I cannot say.



#### Step 5: Isolation Tanks

I have been intrigued by isolation tanks ever since I was first introduced to the concept in college. At first, I was skeptical of the idea. Yet, as the years have gone on and I have garnered more life-experience to draw from, I had grown slightly more convinced of their effectiveness (to the point of curiosity). I decided to try one for myself and see if it created an out-of-body euphoric experience or simply resulted in a panic attack and ear infection. So, one normal afternoon, I trekked out to Float: Flotation Center and Art Gallery in Oakland and gave it a shot.

My experience:

Float is a little bit tricky to find, but I made it out there with a little bit of time to spare (in spite of always getting lost in Oakland). When I got there I noticed that the art gallery front room was filled with some pretty cool plasma globe art. This kind of distracted me and made me a little less apprehensive about climbing into a closed box full of salt water. There was another woman who arrived there at the same time as me for a session, and since we were both first time "floaters," we both got the 10-minute introduction. It started with a little history of the machine, followed by the science behind the tank, and lastly a crash course on what to expect and how to behave inside the tank. The short summation is that the tank is filled with 1,000 pounds of medical grade epsom salt and this is diluted in about 10 inches of water. No matter what you do, you are going to float. Turning over is very difficult, and if you do, you are going to regret it as your eyes will burn for a long time. That said, the chance of falling asleep and drowning is almost nonexistent. The idea is to lay on your back, clear your mind and try to enter a deep meditation. Most first timers enter a prolonged

<http://www.instructables.com/id/10-Ways-to-Alter-Consciousness-Without-Drugs/>

theta state inside the machine, but with some practice, you can fall into a deep sleep in the delta state.

With that introduction, I rinsed off, privately took off all of my clothes, entered the tank, and shut the door behind me. It took a few moments to get used to being in a dark closed space filled with super-saturated salt water. Once I had my bearings I began to try to fall asleep. I couldn't. I was very awakened by the experience. Some more time passed. I suddenly felt my feet start to sink and head start to rise. I moved my body to stop this, which was when I realized that my body was not actually moving. I tried to do make this floating feeling happen again. With some practice I could spin around in all directions without actually having moved. Being a metaphorical weightless disembodied brain in a giant vat was starting to be fun. I was in a trance state akin to being self-hypnotized without actually having to hypnotize myself. All I really had to do was climb in and lay there.

After a while I could no longer easily tell if my eyes were open or shut. I began having visual day dreams. These were typically centered around flying or being a ship on the ocean with moonlight shining on me. I could see the moonlight. This continued for what seemed like 15 minutes and I started to get dizzy and a little bit nauseous. I tried repositioning myself and shifting my center of gravity. Not really having a center of gravity, I kind of did a sideways nose dive like fighter planes often do. I grabbed for the side of the tank and reassured myself that I wasn't actually moving. It was at this moment that I realized that perhaps encouraging out-of-body weightless spinning was not a good idea. I worked at being calm and still. I found a position in which I became an immovable object that was hugged tightly on all sides by the universe. This was quite nice. I liked this. I was finally getting into the groove of this whole isolation tank thing when I heard 3 knocks on the door and knew I had to get out and take a shower.

I was a little off-balanced when I finally sat up, and forgot to follow the directions of how not to get salt water in my eyes. Needless to say, I managed to get some salt water in my eye. This burned like there was no tomorrow. I went and rinsed off. I was a bit dizzy still, but had this weird calm feeling about me. I cannot explain it. When I finally went downstairs and had some tea (Float ends sessions with a cup of tea and gets an A+ for all-around experience), I was kind of feeling - for lack of a better term - strange. I cannot think of any other experience I have had quite like it. I would definitely consider trying it again and recommend it to anyone curious to try.



## Step 6: Fasting

Fasting has been used by numerous cultures throughout the century as a way to cleanse the mind and body. Adherents of fasting claim that once you get past your body's hunger reflex, you start to experience things more clearly and, depending on your religious leaning, experience a deeper relationship with God. I'm not particularly a religious man, but I recently tried a 24 hour fast in the Jewish tradition; that being with no food or water.

My experience:

I started my fast at sundown the night before with a large meal. Rather than sitting on the couch thinking about leftover pizza all day, I set out on a vision quest. Basically, the following afternoon, I trekked through my neighborhood and walked up a bunch of stairs to the top of a very big hill. When I got to the top I was a bit light-headed and tired. My stomach had stopped grumbling at this point. I can't say that I had any grand vision atop that hill, but I definitely fatigued, not quite "thinking straight." I walked down the hill and went home. I proceeded to sit on the couch and think about food and water. My mouth was dry. I had a headache. My stomach would grumble loudly once and a while to remind me that I had not been eating. I laid there until roughly sundown and then had some bagels.

Overall, I would say that my consciousness had been altered. However, I would also say that it was an entirely negative experience that I will not soon be repeating. Albeit I am not a religious man, I would say that if there was a greater power out there, they intended for us to eat and drink.





## Step 7: Biofeedback

Biofeedback enables you to monitor and affect physiological functions that are otherwise not immediately apparent. It does this by taking body functionality that you otherwise would not be able to easily sense, and represents them as sound, visuals, or tactile sensations. One popular thing to sense with biofeedback is the frequency your brain is functioning at (this is called neurofeedback). Using an EEG machine you could monitor brain waves and train your brain to function at certain frequencies. For instance, if you want to be more focused, you can train yourself to induce a hyper-alert beta brain state. This may sound like science fiction, but is actually quite extensively researched and practiced.

My experience:

One simple biofeedback exercise is to monitor neck muscle tension using EMG and train yourself to relax them to prevent tension headaches. Since I sometimes get neck stiffness and headaches on my left side, I decided to give this a try. I built my own EMG setup and configured it as outlined in this [DIY EMG Biofeedback Instructable](#). I tried it for a few days to see if I could relieve muscle tension in my neck and found the results promising. It became increasingly easier to relax my neck muscles. I feel like that with more practice I will be able to control my neck tension without an EMG setup. Being able to prevent headaches by thinking about relaxing muscle groups is one way to subtly alter your mental state.



## Step 8: Clary Sage Bath

I read that adding Clary Sage oil to a nice warm bath has a bit of a calming effect. While it is easy to be skeptical of "hippie things" like aroma therapy baths, I found this one very much worked as advertised. It worked so well, that I would heed warning and not try this while drinking alcohol (it is supposed to have strong narcotic effects).

My experience:

After a few minutes - to my surprise - I started to feel a heaviness in my temples and a sense of lightheadedness. This was a little bit unnerving at first, but after a few more minutes I started to feel very relaxed - very - very - relaxed. My motor skills seemed to be a bit off as well. I reached out to turn the spigot and add more hot water into the tub and missed it. I decided to stop reaching for things and just sit back and relax.

I was now very calm. I closed my eyes. I was hearing all of the sounds around me. I heard water occasionally drip from the faucet, cars driving past a few blocks away on the main road, and a dog bark way off in the distance. Typically, when I take a bath, I spend most of my time wrapped up in thought, but I found myself instead simply relaxed and my mind very clear of thought. It was like I had sunk into the world's most comfortable chair and could not get up. Eventually I managed to break free of the peaceful grip of the tub. The very relaxed and lightheaded feeling persisted for some time afterwards.



## Step 9: Staring at a Candle

Okay. This seems kind of silly, but if you sit in a dark room and stare at a candle for ten minutes while trying not to blink, you will experience subtle visual hallucinations. This sounds too simplistic to actually work, but I begrudgingly admit that it does. Which brings me too...

My experience:

At first it was hard to keep focused on the candle without blinking. After about a minute this task started to become easier. My eyes focused on the light and began to relax and the candle doubled in vision. After a while longer there started to be a glowing red and yellow sphere around the flame. Then, I blinked. I had to start over. I got to seeing the sphere, blinked, and started over again. This time I began to see a sphere and pushed through my desire to blink. My entire field of vision began to become wavy and finally the sphere appeared to be shooting arcs of light out of it kind of like a lightning globe. This was not the most exciting thing I ever saw, but definitely was a visual hallucination. I wasn't able to maintain it for long because then I blinked, my vision reset itself and I quit because I figured I took this about as far as I could. When I was done, I turned on the lights and had a blue and red dot burnt into the center of my field of vision for about five minutes. This alarmed me enough not to ever try this again. I suggest that you don't try this either.



## Step 10: Go Upside Down

This seems kind of simplistic, but turning upside down will change the way you perceive things on two levels. First, it will change your visual perspective. The ceiling becomes the floor. Floor lamps become chandeliers. Things in general just get strange. That aside, if you stay upside down for more than a few seconds, you will get a rush of blood to your head. The heart has not evolved not to pump blood against gravity very well and standing on your head means that more blood will settle there. Over a short period this will result in a mildly-altered state of consciousness. Over a long period, this can result in bad things like stroke, heart attack or blindness. I don't recommend standing on your head for very long.

My experience:

While I initially resolved simply to lean upside down over the edge of the couch, I decided to go all out and fully stand on my head. I cannot remember the last time that I had stood on my head, and it was a bit more of a challenge than I remember. However, I leaned against a wall, and once I got up, I was very stable and confident in that position (minus the discomfort of my whole entire body weight pushing down on my neck). After about 30 seconds, my orientation changed and what was up was down; and down was now up.

I was just hanging out here checking things out for about another two to three minutes when I started to feel a throbbing pressure in my head. This was the feeling of blood rushing in. I held this for another 30 seconds and suddenly things did not feel quite right. I decided that perhaps balancing on my head in this state for much longer was not a good idea. I carefully returned to my feet and was very light-headed and dizzy. Aside from a stiff neck, things were feeling good, and perhaps I was imagining things, but my vision seemed sharper.

