

# You can do magic!

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*Magic has been  
entertaining people  
for centuries. Now Dr  
Nicola Davies discovers  
that it can even have  
health benefits.*  
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**A**s well as appealing to our inner child and sense of wonder, magic has been found to provide psychological benefits for the performer. Tim Stracey, for instance, had experienced depression for years. He lost his marriage and his job, and found himself in a men's crisis home two years ago, on the brink of suicide. Practising magic and performing shows became therapeutic for him. Today, he is a full-time mentalist magician; he entertains people at private and corporate events, and also tries to break the stigma around negative mental health.

Stracey isn't the only one experiencing health benefits associated with magic therapy. In the United States, illusionist Kevin Spencer was in a near-fatal accident in 1988, which resulted in serious head and lower spinal cord injuries. While recuperating, he developed what is now called the 'Healing of Magic' approach, a therapeutic program using simple magic tricks to encourage the physical and psychosocial rehabilitation of patients with mental health and behavioural problems.

And just as Stracey weaves positive messages about mental health into his performances, another magician and mentalist from India, Nakul Shenoy, also uses magic to communicate socially relevant messages. Shenoy has written and spoken extensively about how knowledge and training can benefit a magician-in-the-making. The therapeutic and rehabilitation purposes of magic can be classified as follows:

Magic can cut across barriers of language, education, gender and age, to create social awareness and public engagement.

### 1. Mental development

Performing and mastering magic takes time and patience. It requires a high degree of mental stimulation and concentration for a magician to be able to follow through on complex instructions and tasks. Constant practice helps increase a person's tolerance for frustration and stress. It is also mentally therapeutic because it keeps the mind and body active, and it is entertaining and emotionally uplifting for the learner.

### 2. Personal growth

Magic can be a terrific tool to boost self-confidence, self-esteem, motor dexterity, and public speaking skills of someone going through depression. It can encourage self-expression and independence, as well as strengthen your sense of identity.

### 3. Social development

A magician needs an audience. Performing tricks can be an ice-breaker to connect with people. It requires a person to engage with their audience, persuade them, and understand what's going on in their minds. By capturing an audience's attention, magic can also be a way for a person to achieve a sense of control over an otherwise chaotic environment.

Magic, like any other unique hobby, can bring a sense of accomplishment during difficult times. It can shift your focus and energy onto a wonderful, emotionally appealing activity that harnesses your skills. An engaging hobby like magic can enhance your mental development, motor dexterity and ability to connect with other people, which are all essential to healing from depression or, indeed, any ill health. ✨

### Find out more

**The Australian Magic Institute** An organisation dedicated to furthering the standard and reputation of Australian magicians. [www.australianinstituteofmagic.org](http://www.australianinstituteofmagic.org)

**The Magic Academy** Magic lessons and courses. [www.themagicacademy.com.au](http://www.themagicacademy.com.au)  
**Hey Presto Magic Study** The largest magic shop in the Southern hemisphere, Sydney-based. [www.heyprestomagic.com](http://www.heyprestomagic.com)

### You can do magic ...

**Anybody can learn magic and harness the health benefits that it offers.**

**Here's how:**

**1. Read books** Many magicians say that magic books are the best tools to learn technique. Books provide detailed demonstrations and logical explanations of basic tricks and show how you to progress to more complicated ones. However, reading alone isn't enough. Practising the tricks is key. Ideally, beginners should initially perform for small groups of people who can provide constructive feedback.

**2. Visit magic shops** There are plenty that sell books, DVDs, specialty cards and packaged tricks. Visiting one can help a beginner to assess their current skill level. Initially, restrict yourself to simply observing what the shop has to offer. Many beginners admit to buying a host of expensive packaged tricks, thinking that they will expedite the complexity of their performance. However, starting with the basic classic tricks is best and creates a firm foundation from which to progress.

**3. Take classes** Although membership of the Australian Institute of Magic (AIM) is by invitation only, AIM nonetheless provides

workshops and classes for anyone interested in learning magic. They have a roster of experienced magicians who offer private sessions or group classes to suit the learner's age and level of experience. Another institution that offers magic classes in Australia is the Magic Academy. They have seven levels of courses, which are intended for professional development and personal growth. Some of the types of magic they teach include card tricks, card manipulation, platform magic, and mentalism.

**4. Get in touch with other magicians** AIM organises events where magicians-in-the-making can meet with professionals, such as the Melbourne Magic Festival and Melbourne's Magic Nights. AIM's website also outlines other Australian clubs that hold regular meetings for magic enthusiasts. Many magicians also provide tutorials on the internet for free. AIM's website provides video links to tutorials for basic tricks, such as the "Triple Outcome Prediction," "Sensitive Fingers," and some tricks relating to Question Cards. Beginners can study available online resources, as well as discover and participate in online forums for magicians from all over the world.