Guided Imagery

Guided Imagery is a kind of deliberate, directed daydreaming that uses soothing music and narrative to evoke multisensory memory, symbol and fantasy. This combination gently guides the overactive mind into a relaxed, immersive state of healing reverie. It works easily and powerfully for most people, and doesn’t require much from them – just some basic imagination. Many people who have trouble meditating or relaxing do really well with guided imagery.

Tips for Guided Imagery

• Listening once or twice a day for several weeks makes a difference.
• Imagery involves using all of your senses, not just visualizing.
• The best times to listen are when waking up and falling asleep.
• Even if you keep falling asleep while listening, you still benefit.
• Imagery that evokes emotion and sensation has more impact.
• You don’t have to believe in its impact for it to work.
• The more you use imagery, the better at it you get.
• Guided imagery works even better in a group than alone.
• Imagery doesn’t compete with other forms of treatment.

More information:

Guided imagery is the conscious use of the imagination to create positive images ("healing visualizations") in order to bring about healthful changes in both the body and the mind. Creating mental images is nothing new for most people. Everyone has daydreams, perhaps of a set of new clothes or of winning the lottery. Guided imagery takes this natural process a step further. By working with a trained practitioner, or using special audiotapes, you can learn to communicate more effectively with your unconscious mind, requesting that your body function in an optimal and healthy way.

The belief that the power of imagination can help people heal has ancient roots. Traditional folk healers known as shamans used guided imagery to treat ailments. In Eastern medicine, envisioning well-being has always been an important part of the therapeutic process. In Tibetan medicine, in particular, creating a mental image of the healing god would improve the patient's chances for recovery. The ancient Greeks, including Aristotle and Hippocrates (the "father of modern medicine") also had their patients use imagery in their healing process.

It was not until the 1960s, however, that psychologists exploring the emerging field of biofeedback first began to appreciate the powers of the mind on the physical body. Through biofeedback, they could teach patients to slow heart rate, lower blood pressure, or open lungs stricken with asthma. In addition, a cardiologist, Dr. Herbert Benson, observes that when people relax their thinking, the body follows with slower breathing and blood pressure. He calls this the "relaxation response." Then, in the 1970s, O. Carl Simonton, M.D., chief of Radiation Therapy at Travis Air Force base in Fairfield, California, and psychotherapist Stephanie Matthews-Simonton, devised a program--today known as the Simonton method--that utilized guided imagery to help cancer patients. The patients pictured their white blood cells attacking their cancer cells (sometimes in scenes that resembled the popular old video game "Pac-Man"). Simonton found that the more vivid the images his patients used (for example, ravenous sharks attacking feeble little fish), the better the process worked.

Since then, a good deal of research into mind-body connections has appeared in mainstream medical literature.

--Excerpted from wholehealthmd.com

Resources

Free guided imagery downloads by Belleruth Naparstek:
Go to www.KaiserPermanente.org. Click on “Health and Wellness” tab, then “Live Healthy.” Scroll down on your left under Audio and Video: Guided imagery link.

Another excellent resource which is highly recommended: