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Brief Summary on the Effectiveness of Imagery

Guided imagery, more than listening to relaxing sounds, stimulates a learning process by creating an inner reality, relaxing the breathing, and consciously directing the ability to imagine. The effects of vivid guided imagery sends a message to the emotional control center of the brain where a message is passed along to the body's endocrine, immune, and autonomic nervous systems. These systems influence a wide range of bodily functions, including the heart, breathing, blood pressure, as well as others.

Patients benefit from guided imagery by:

- Reducing the side effects from cancer treatment.
- Reducing fear and anxiety prior to surgery. Studies have shown that surgery patients who participated in two to four guided imagery sessions required less pain medication and shorter hospital stays than those who had not used imagery.
- Managing stress.
- Managing headaches. Studies have shown that guided imagery may aid in reducing the frequency of migraine headaches as effectively as taking preventive medication. (Mayo Clinic January 2008).

Key Points from Scholarly Research

Stephanie and Carl Simonton, Bernie Siegel, Larry LeShan, Jeanne Achterberg, Bell Ruth Napersteck among others were creating positive press for guided imagery. The following is by Napersteck (2011).

- What clinicians and researchers showed that guided imagery could reduce the unpleasant side effects of cancer and its treatment (nausea, fatigue, anxiety, pain, stress, depression, fear of medical procedures), and that it could beef up coping ability, quality of life, energy, hopefulness, confidence and motivation.
- Over two decades of research, guided imagery went from being a tape requested by a few cranky, demanding patients to becoming a legitimate adjunctive tool for treatment that pharmas offer out alongside their anti-emetics.

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- From 2000 to 2010, hospitals tripled their adoption rates of guided imagery (also massage therapy, meditation and healing touch or Reiki) over the last decade. Although late to the party, the American Cancer Society began describing imagery as a useful adjunct to help cancer patients cope as well.
- In 2008, there was a notable uptick in research involving state-of-the-art blood assays and brain scans. Several exciting studies published showed that guided imagery could indeed produce changes in immune activity on the cellular level. (See also hypnosis and meditation).
- Data analysis from the University of Pennsylvania School of Medicine concluded that hypnotic imagery yielded a significantly heightened count of "natural killer" or NK cells (Hudacek).
- An article in the *International Journal of Neuroscience* described how guided imagery elevated immune system functioning, and how cell-specific imagery affects corresponding white blood counts, neutrophils and lymphocytes (Trakhtenberg).
- A small but well-designed study with breast cancer patients in 2008, by a group of researchers from the University of South Florida, showed that guided imagery produced significant effect sizes, with increased natural killer cell activity and cytotoxicity, and increased activation of Interleukin-2 (Lengacher et al).
- In 2009, a larger randomized, controlled study out of the UK with breast cancer patients revealed big differences in activated T-cells, natural killer cells and lymphokine-activated killer cells, concluding that guided imagery up-regulated anti-cancer host defenses during and after chemotherapy and radiotherapy (Eremin, Walker et al).
- In 2016, a randomized, controlled study out of M.D. Anderson using men with prostate cancer showed that those who used diaphragmatic breathing and guided imagery had significantly higher levels of natural killer cell cytotoxicity, higher levels of circulating pro-inflammatory cytokines, and higher tumor necrosis factor- α , while the immune parameters got better and better for the intervention group, they decreased or stayed the same for the controls (Cohen et al).

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Playful Examples of Imagery

How to choose a believable Imagery?

- What are your stories?
- What are your symbols?
- If you could have any ally in the world who would it be? Why?
- Internal dialogue with your Image
(Journal conversation)

Incorporate all of your senses:

Visual –only 55% of people can do this

Auditory

Smell

Taste

Touch

Kinetic Energy – Body movement

Proprioceptive Awareness- Body sensations

Kinetic Energy and Proprioceptive Awareness, often ignored and therefore not incorporated into imagery, but they are absolutely the information system you need to work as a healer in your own body. Examples of these are movement, breathing, and practices that get you in touch with your body, such as dancing, yoga, etc.