

Non-Drug Pain Relief: Imagery

Relaxation helps lessen tension. One way to help decrease pain is to use imagery. Imagery is using your imagination to create a thought or image that will distract you from your pain. Imagery does not replace pain medicine. It works with your pain medicine to help you have better pain relief.

How Imagery Helps

Imagery is used to help reduce stress that can cause muscle tension. It can help relieve tense muscles that may add to the pain. Imagery can be thought of as a focused daydream that uses all of your senses – sight, touch, hearing, smell and taste. Certain images may reduce pain both during imagery and for a period of time afterward. You can imagine and revisit favorite spots in your mind to help you relax, relieve boredom, decrease anxiety and help you sleep.

Directions for Using Imagery

1. Find a quiet room where you can get into a comfortable position to relax. Close your eyes.
2. Do not fold your arms or cross your legs. You may cut off circulation and cause numbness and tingling.
3. Breathe in deeply. Exhale slowly as though you are whistling. Breathe deeply and exhale slowly three times. This will help you relax.
4. Picture in your mind something that is peaceful to you or a place that you have enjoyed visiting. This pleasant image should represent how you picture pain relief. For example:
 - ▶ Think of pain as a large boulder that is on a part of your body weighing you down and causing pain. Picture large helium-filled balloons attached to the boulder carrying it away from you and taking away the pain.

This handout is for informational purposes only. Talk with your doctor or health care team if you have any questions about your care.

- ▶ Think of the pain as a thunderstorm with lightning and thunder that rains on your body. Imagine how the pain medicine is like a gentle breeze that blows the rain and thunderclouds away. Instead of rain and thunder, you have sunshine and warmth. The air smells clean and fresh, the rain has watered all the beautiful flowers and the grass is green and lush. There are swans and ducks on a pond. Only a ripple, caused by the ducks' gentle paddling, disturbs the water's peaceful state.
5. Use imagery at least 20 minutes a day.
 6. It is best to try imagery before your pain becomes severe, or while you are waiting for your pain medicine to work.
 7. If you are keeping a pain management log, write down your use of relaxation and imagery and how it works.