

# **The Value of Relaxation and Guided Imagery Interventions for Coping with Chronic Illnesses**

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# Relaxation and Guided Imagery (GI)

Relaxation and Guided Imagery (GI) are gentle, yet powerful mind body techniques that teach people how to become deeply relaxed and then to use sensory images to promote well-being, healing and problem solving.

# A User-Friendly Method

- ◆ GI is a natural, non-invasive, empowering method that can improve Quality of Life and promote patient adherence and acceptance of necessary, healing processes.
- ◆ It is versatile, inexpensive, practiced anywhere, except driving, and portable.
- ◆ It is easily taught over the web, live, one on one, in patient groups or alone; it can be downloaded from a website.
- ◆ It is easily incorporated into a variety of nursing protocols, home visits, pt groups, Helplines, life coaching, injection protocols, clinical trials, MRI scans or reducing stress for caregivers at home.

# A Versatile Intervention

- ◆ GI can be used by almost anyone, including those with mild to moderate dementia.
- ◆ It does not matter what level of education or what kind of religious/ethnic background participant possesses.
- ◆ You do not even have to be a believer for it to work
- ◆ The more you practice it, unlike addiction, the less you need.
- ◆ It is fast and powerful in its effects and, for most Westerners, it is easier to use than traditional meditation as it requires less time and discipline to develop a high level of skill.

# Patient Empowerment

- ◆ Using GI creates a locus of control within us.
- ◆ This lowers a sense of helplessness and reactivity and increases responsiveness.
- ◆ It creates an atmosphere of allowing yourself to find responses to things rather than forcing yourself or commanding yourself to cope or heal.
- ◆ It enables us to rehearse and prepare for challenging or painful events.
- ◆ It can produce radical shifts in attitude, coping and receptivity to problem solving which, in turn, increases treatment compliance and positive coping.

# Efficacy of Guided Imagery

- ◆ GI has been an integral part of Holistic Nursing Practice for many years and is a well regarded complementary therapy.
- ◆ Well-designed research studies have shown GI to:
  - 1) Reduce anxiety and depression (Apostolo & Kolcaba, 2009; McKinney et al, 1997);
  - 2) Shift pain experience (Sharpe et al, 2001), eliminate headaches (Penzien et al, 2002; Mannix et al, 1999) reduce arthritic pain (Baird & Murawaski, 2010; Gay et al, 2002) and fibromyalgia (Whiting et al, 2001);

# Efficacy of Guided Imagery (cont.)

- 3) Increase diabetic self care to maintain diabetic regimen with blood testing, exercise, weight management & restrictive diet (Wichowski & Kubsch, 1999)
- 4) Reduce tremors in Parkinson's patients (Schlesinger et al, 2009)
- 5) Increase adherence to therapies and drug therapies (Mohr et al, 1997).
- 6) Lower blood pressure ( Hermann, 2002
- 7) Lower injection anxiety (Franco, 2008; Halpin & Spier, 2002).

# Guided Imagery Studies and MS

- ◆ Three studies have examined effects of GI to influence mood, attitudes and Quality of Life of MS patients:
  - 1) Maguire (1996) Relaxation and Imagery led to significant reductions in anxiety;
  - 2) Sutherland et al (2005) found GI improved QOL in regards to increased vigor and energy;
  - 3) Franco (2008) found GI effective in lowering general anxiety and injection anxiety in 97% of MS pts even after several weeks post-workshop.

# Additional Potential Applications for MS:

## 1) STRESSFREE MRIs \*

- ◆ Effective intervention to reduce feelings of claustrophobia and anxiety with MRI scans. No studies exist for MS pts who must take closed MRIs MRI's throughout the course of their disease.
- ◆ Prior studies (Friday and Kebai, 1990; Thompson and Coppano, 1994) demonstrated that GI can reduce movement during scans, eliminate need for sedation, reduce costs so repeat procedures and time lost from work for repeat scans.

◆ \*( CD, Franco, 2009)

# Additional Potential Application for MS:

## 2) INTERSTITIAL CYSTITIS

- ◆ More than 1 million women in US experience urinary urgency, frequent pelvic pain and IC is a common symptom of MS.
- ◆ Pilot Study: Comico, Peters and Diokno (2008) found GI to significantly reduce pain and urgency in a treatment group of 45 women.
- ◆ No studies exist on application of GI for IC in MS pt population.

# Additional Potential Application for MS:

## 3) RELIEVING CAREGIVER STRESS \*

- ◆ Numerous studies document compelling evidence for stress, depression and declining health of MS caregivers resulting in:
  - 1) Increased stress (4xs higher than in general population (Dewis & Niskala, 1992);
  - 2) Increased depression and lower QOL of MS caregiver (NARCOMS, 2007; Forbes et al, 2007);
  - 3) Declining health: increased onset of arthritis (Aronson et al, 2001); High blood pressure and cholesterol (NARCOMS, 2007); sleeplessness, breathlessness, back pain (Forbes et al, 2007);
  - 4) Decreased social support (McKeown et al, 2002).

\*(CD, Franco, 2009).

# Caregiver\Carepartners' Stress

- ◆ Evercare Study (2007, National Caregivers Alliance) found that caregivers #1 and most frequent request is for STRESS REDUCTION increase sleep and energy and reduce pain and aching.
- ◆ Compromised immune function and shorter life expectancy found in national studies on Alzheimer's caregivers (Kiecolt-Glaser, 2003; Epel, 2004).

# The ABCs of Relaxation and Guided Imagery

## ◆ How does it work?

- ◆ **First**, learn how to become deeply relaxed, while conscious by use of diaphragmatic breathing and body scan, then imagine with your senses letting go of tension in the body.
- ◆ It is not necessary to work at relaxing, it is impossible to maintain a state of relaxation and a state of tension at the same time.

# Multisensory Imaging

- ◆ Once relaxed, sensory images are added to the experience, e.g., guiding someone to go to their ideal place of relaxation or a safe place.
- ◆ Under these conditions, our bodies do not discriminate between sensory images in the mind and what we call reality.
- ◆ Our bodies treat the imagined image as if it is happening and these effects reverberate, like depth charges, within the body.

# The Neurochemistry of Guided Imagery

- ◆ Parasympathetic functioning is increased, promoting, rest and energy renewal, relaxed blood flow, lower muscle tension and reduced bracing and stiffness.
- ◆ Heightened Right Brain Activity is increased and stimulates increased intuition, symbolic reasoning, sensory processing, creativity and receptivity.
- ◆ Our own natural pharmacy is “turned on”-- neuropeptides, short term immune function, neurotransmitters flush through the system longer and their effects more sustained.

# A Focused Reverie, Being in the Zone

- ◆ In this relaxed meditative state, the emotions, mood, physiologic state associated with the idea or image appear very vivid, very immediate and the place or event is experienced as a whole person, whole body state.
- ◆ Sensory images experienced in this relaxed state create a “lived experience” and effect more powerful change than analyzing one’s attitudes or behavior

# A Focused Reverie, Being in the Zone

- ◆ This allows people to discover personal meaning and increase their understanding of how to cope with less reactivity.
- ◆ Can shift our attitudes, perceptions rapidly, practice strategies that work and promote self efficacy.
- ◆ When we apply this to a specific focus, we have an awesome ally, a way to experience a source of internal strength and skill in approaching a goal.