

# GUIDED IMAGERY POCKET GUIDE

## FAST FACTS

- The practice of guided imagery is based on the ability of the mind to cultivate a seemingly real experience in the body through the use of the imagination and senses.
- Guided imagery has been found effective for conditions such as fibromyalgia, irritable bowel syndrome, post-traumatic stress and cancer-related anxiety, pain and depression.

## WHAT IS GUIDED IMAGERY?

Guided imagery is a mind-body practice that uses the imagination and sensory memory to induce a state of relaxation and physiological, emotional and attitudinal responses. A common example used to illustrate the power of guided imagery is imagining eating a lemon. By describing eating a lemon using the five senses a person will begin to salivate as though they had just taken a bite from the fruit itself; the body responds to the imaginative description in a realistic manner. In a similar manner, imagining being in a relaxed space through all of the senses can create a physiological experience of being relaxed - turning on a relaxation response in what is called the parasympathetic nervous system.

## WHAT CONDITIONS DOES GUIDED IMAGERY TREAT?

Guided imagery is used to treat a wide range of physical and mental health conditions and address symptoms related to chronic health concerns including, but not limited to:

- Anxiety
- Depression
- Substance abuse
- Grief
- Relationship issues
- Family and parenting issues
- Behavioral issues
- Chronic pain (including children and adolescents)
- Acute pain after surgery or trauma
- Insomnia
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Crohn's disease
- Asthma
- Childbirth
- Epilepsy
- Fibromyalgia
- Headache
- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Menopause symptoms
- Menstrual cramps
- Nausea
- Nightmares
- Post-traumatic stress disorder
- Rheumatoid arthritis
- Ringing in the ears (tinnitus)
- Smoking cessation
- Surgical outcomes such as bleeding and infection, morphine use, length of stay, pre- and post-op anxiety
- Temporomandibular joint dysfunction

Guided imagery has also been reported to produce a positive impact on healthy individuals who are seeking to improve their physical and mental health such as:

- Immune system
- Stress levels
- Quality of life
- Emotional regulation
- Self-care
- Peak performance

Guided imagery is frequently used to improve performance in sports and athletics.

## Is there evidence that guided imagery works?

In the last 20 years, as patients increasingly integrate complementary and alternative medicine into their treatment plans, more and more literature is being published exploring and confirming the positive impact guided imagery for certain conditions.

- Fibromyalgia patients who received guided imagery for eight weeks saw a significant decrease in their depression and pain symptoms.<sup>1</sup>
- Gut-directed guided imagery for irritable bowel syndrome was as effective as diet monitoring and modification for people suffering from irritable bowel syndrome. Patients who received guided imagery experienced an increase in quality of life not seen in patients just receiving diet monitoring and modification.<sup>2</sup>

- Psychiatric inpatients suffering from depressive disorders who listened to a guided imagery once a day for 10 days in addition to their treatment as usual experienced significant decreases in depression, anxiety and perceived stress.<sup>3</sup>
- When used by breast cancer patients for 20 minutes 7 days after undergoing chemotherapy, they experienced a significant decrease in insomnia, anxiety, pain and depression.<sup>4</sup>
- A systematic review and meta-analysis found that people suffering from PTSD, sleep disturbances, nightmares and insomnia saw significant improvements when they engaged in a daily guided imagery practice. These effects lasted six to 12 months even after they had stopped the guided imagery program.<sup>5</sup>
- Marines with PTSD had significantly more improvement in all measures than those receiving only usual care when they engaged in daily guided imagery for three weeks.<sup>6</sup>

If you or your healthcare provider are seeking more in-depth research on the effectiveness or impact of guided imagery on a particular health concern, visit:

- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/>
- <https://nccih.nih.gov/taxonomy/term/362>

### Are there precautions, side effects or safety concerns I should be aware of before I start guided imagery?

Guided imagery is widely considered a safe way of addressing many physical and mental conditions; side effects are rare.

### How often should I seek treatment from a guided imagery practitioner? How long is each session?

Typically, classes or an individual session with a practitioner can run anywhere from 10 minutes to an hour. Many practitioners will encourage you to begin a daily guided imagery practice in addition to attending your guided imagery sessions.

### Do I need to attend classes or work with a certified clinician to begin guided imagery?

It is not necessary for you to seek the help of a clinician to begin your own guided imagery practice. There are many resources available, including phone applications, MP3s and CDs. If you would like to sample or try out a guided meditation before making a purchase, there are many guided imagery sessions available on YouTube.

Additionally, Health Journeys has over 200 guided imagery recordings designed for different mental or physical conditions from which you may be suffering. To explore the Health Journeys catalog, visit <https://www.healthjourneys.com/audio-library>

### What is the difference between guided meditation and guided imagery?

You may see these terms used interchangeably, however, there is a difference between the two practices. Guided imagery is a kind

of meditation that leads a person's imagination into a particular state by describing a scene or place and invoking all of the senses.

### What training/certifications do guided imagery clinicians have?

Unlike some disciplines, a nationally recognized centralized organization that oversees the certifications and training requirements of guided imagery clinicians and practitioners does not exist.

The Academy for Guided Imagery (AGI) is the most widely recognized and attended guided imagery certification program. Imagery International is a professional association of guided imagery practitioners that provides more information on training.

Before seeking treatment of a guided imagery therapist, ask for their qualifications and research the organization where they received training.

### How do I find guided imagery classes being taught near me?

Visit [ImageryInternational.org](http://ImageryInternational.org) to search for a provider near you.

### Will my insurance company cover the cost of seeing a guided imagery practitioner?

If the guided imagery therapist you are seeing is certified in any other therapeutic disciplines or guided imagery is included as part of a therapeutic intervention, it is possible that your insurance may cover some of the costs.

### Should I inform my primary care physician that I am seeing a guided imagery clinician?

Guided imagery therapy or classes can be used alongside any conventional treatments you are receiving; but it is not meant to take the place of a proven conventional treatment. Any decisions regarding treatment plans should be discussed with your doctor(s) prior to making changes to your treatment plan.

#### Endnotes:

- 1 Onieva-Zafra, M.D., García, L.H., & Del Valle, M.G. (2015). Effectiveness of guided imagery relaxation on levels of pain and depression in patients diagnosed with fibromyalgia. *Holistic Nursing Practice*, 29(1): pp. 13-21.
- 2 Boltin, D., Sahar, N., Gil, E., Aizic, S., Hod, K., Levi-Drummer, R., Niv, Y., & Dickman, R. (2015). Gut-directed guided affective imagery as an adjunct to dietary modification in irritable bowel syndrome. *Journal of Health Psychology*, 20(6): pp. 712-720.
- 3 Apóstolo, J.L. & Kolcaba, K. (2009). The effects of guided imagery on comfort, depression, anxiety, and stress of psychiatric inpatients with depressive disorders. *Archive of Psychiatric Nurses*, 23(6): pp. 403-411.
- 4 Chen SF, Wang HH, Yang HY, Chung UL. Effect of Relaxation With Guided Imagery on The Physical and Psychological Symptoms of Breast Cancer Patients Undergoing Chemotherapy. *Iran Red Crescent Med J*. 2015 Nov 28;17(11)
- 5 Casement, M.D. & Swanson, L.M. (2012). A meta-analysis of imagery rehearsal for post-trauma nightmares: effects on nightmare frequency, sleep quality, and posttraumatic stress. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 32(6): pp. 566-574.
- 6 Jain S., McMahon, G.F., Hasen, P., Kozub, M.P., Porter, V., King, R., & Guarneri, E.M. (2012). Healing Touch with Guided Imagery for PTSD in returning active duty military: a randomized controlled trial. *Military Medicine*, 177(9): pp. 1015-1021.