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.1
- 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.2

Produced as an educational resource by Samueli Integrative Health Programs to support access and awareness of integrative health. All health decisions should be made in consultation with a health care provider.
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. 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. 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. 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.

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:


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](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:**


