

A Guide to Guided Imagery

If you were scheduled for surgery and were offered a drug with no side effects that could decrease your anxiety, pain, and length of hospital stay, would you be interested? What if it was not a drug, but a meditative experience? Recent research shows that guided imagery has a significant impact on pre and postoperative anxiety, pain and length of stay in patients undergoing surgery.¹ Researchers have demonstrated that it can decrease blood pressure, decrease blood glucose levels, decrease histamine response to allergies, enhance wound and bone healing, and improve coping and self confidence.² It is pleasant to do too.

Guided imagery is used to focus the mind, induce relaxation and shift attention away from the external environment. Even if you are not having surgery, guided imagery can induce relaxation that can help you reduce anxiety, manage stress, and sleep better. You can do it in the privacy of your own mind, but it is best to have someone else read a guided imagery script to you. Recording the script on tape works well, so you can play it over repeatedly.

A number of excellent guided imagery tapes are available in bookstores, but if you want to create your own guided imagery script, start with instructions for deeper breathing and relaxation. Then develop a story that unfolds peaceful imagery, such as a special place to go to that is beautiful, safe and relaxing. This might be a natural setting like a beach, a forest, or a mountain meadow. Invite attention to the senses. The sights, sounds, smells and feel of the place should be taken in. You want to create in the mind a multi-sensory image of the special place. Once the meditator is fully relaxed, breathing slowly and mentally occupied with a vivid peaceful image, they are ready to do some inner work. This might be to create images of the immune system doing its job of cleaning up health problems. It might involve working through emotional issues or gathering emotional resources. It might just suggest that the next step is a restful sleep. The end of the script should invite the person to return to alertness, if that is the desired result. Peaceful background music can add to the effectiveness of the experience.

Here is a sample guided imagery script that you can use:

Prepare yourself for an experience of peace and calm. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Loosen any constrictive clothing and begin to shed the cares that keep you from feeling your best. Take a nice deep breath through your nose and hold it for a few seconds... and let it out through your mouth with a sigh. Again, inhale through your nose and let go of the breath with a relaxing sigh. Do this a few times, and each time, let the relaxation that you are beginning to feel grow a little deeper.

Now use your mind to scan your body for tension. Starting at the top of your head and slowly working down to the soles of your feet, notice wherever your muscles are holding on. Wherever you feel tightness or hardness, invite in looseness and softness. Your muscles have no need to work hard right now, so let them have some time off. Invite your muscles to become soft and flexible. They are strong when they need to be, but right now they rest with the gentleness of a flower floating on water.

As you scan your body, you let go, and your body settles into a comfortable position with no holding on, no grasping, just peace and alignment with the forces of nature. Your breath is calm and relaxed. Your head and arms and legs and torso have settled in gently to a position of complete relaxation.

Now create in your mind an image of a beautiful place. This is a special place that you can go to in your mind to find refuge from your cares. You might select a tropical beach, a mountain meadow, or a forest glade. Maybe it is a lovely garden or some other place of significance to you. See yourself in this place on

a perfect summer day. The sky is blue and there are a few white puffy clouds. You can feel a gentle breeze on your skin. The temperature is just right for you to be perfectly comfortable. You can hear nearby the sound of water. Take a moment to listen. What else can you hear? Perhaps you can hear the gentle call of birds or the rustling of leaves. What can you smell in this place? Is there a scent, perhaps of flowers in the breeze?

Spend as much time as you like in this place. Rest. Be at peace, and know that you can come back here any time you wish for respite and relaxation.

When you are ready, in your mind, look for a foot path that leads away from the spot where you have been resting. Take a walk on this path. It will take you to another place, also a peaceful place, but this is a place to meet someone very special. Here you will meet a being of great wisdom and love. Follow the path in your mind until it comes to an open space. See this place as covered with grass, and on the grass is an exquisitely woven carpet. Upon the carpet rest a number of silk pillows. You know in your mind that you are to make yourself comfortable on the carpet and pillows. So situate yourself in this meeting place and know that this place and everything there is for you to use as you see fit. Look around and see what is there. See this place as filled with a wonderful crystal clear light. Everything is bright and colorful. You see green grass and green leaves. Flowers bloom, and their scent is very pleasant.

Imagine now that you are inviting into this wonderful place a being of great wisdom and compassion. Because you seek understanding, this being is pleased to come to you. Soon you find that seated across from you is someone whose heart is full of love and whose mind is pure and wise. You look into their eyes and see love. It is as if their whole body radiates light and love. From the area of their heart a bright light shines directly into your heart. You feel in that light a warm and kindly energy. A sense of well-being builds in your heart and spreads through your whole body. From top to bottom you are filled with loving light that glows into every cell of your body. Every cell, every molecule in your body is touched by healing love.

Now perhaps you have a question for this wise one. Perhaps something has been troubling you and you need an answer. Perhaps some thought or emotion has been a stumbling block to your development. You are free to ask whatever you would like. Form your question and then listen very carefully. Take as much time as you need.

It is possible that this is not the time for you to have an answer, but if it is the time, see what presents itself. The answer may come as a thought. You might hear words in your mind or see an image. Be open to whatever arises from the source of wisdom.

Feel free to have a dialogue with this friendly being with whom you share this special place. Perhaps you would like to spend time with them quietly. When you feel that you are finished, prepare to leave this place.

Return your attention to your body. Feel yourself in your body. Take a deep breath and let it out. Clench your fists. Stretch your arms and legs and open your eyes.

Source: <http://www.interluderetreat.com/meditate/guidemed.htm>