

**GIFTS OF THE IMAGINATION:
SURVIVING AND THRIVING BEYOND CANCER**

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Guided imagery is a form of deliberate, directed daydreaming - a purposeful use of the imagination that deploys words and phrases designed to evoke rich, multi-sensory fantasy and memory. The voice tone, pacing and choice of language, usually accompanied by relaxing music, create a deeply immersive mind-state which is ideal for catalyzing desired changes in mind, body, psyche and spirit. For most people, imagery is an easy, user-friendly form of meditation that yields immediate results. Its gentle nature belies its potency and its research-proven, cumulative efficacy.

Imagery has been found to reduce anxiety, stress and depression, lower blood pressure, reduce cholesterol and lipid peroxides, speed up healing from cuts, fractures and burns, reduce blood loss and length of hospital stay in surgery patients, beef up short term immune function, reduce pain from arthritis, headache and fibromyalgia, increase comfort during all manner of medical procedures, lower HemoglobinA1c in diabetics, improve motor deficits in stroke patients, reduce fear in young children undergoing MRIs and needle sticks, support healthy pregnancy, reduce the symptoms of posttraumatic stress, cut down bingeing and purging in people with bulimia, improve success rates in infertile couples, accelerate weight loss, remediate alopecia, enhance academic performance, improve sports performance, improve concentration in developmentally disabled adults, supplement medical training through imaginal rehearsal, improve quality of life in end of life care, to name just a few of the established benefits. Indeed, given the last twenty years of research findings in various clinical trials, it is surprising that imagery isn't prescribed as a universal, low-cost, preventative health tool, in much the same way that aspirin is used to reduce the likelihood of future heart attacks and strokes.

This simple, subtle practice packs a powerful punch because of the way it can skip around cognition and send healing messages straight into the whole being, by way of primitive, sensory and emotion-based channels in the brain and nervous system. Imagery travels primarily via right brain sensing, perceiving, feeling and apprehending, rather than through left brain thinking, judging, analyzing and deciding. Because of this, and the way that trauma amps up visual and emotional centers in the brain, while short circuiting language and cognition, it is an ideal intervention for posttraumatic stress.

Indeed, imagery is the gift that keeps on giving, creating a highly malleable reverie state, where healing images can act like a depth charge dropped deep beneath the

surface of the body-mind, reverberating again and again, delivering complex, layered, oblique healing messages to mind, body and spirit.

It is fast, powerful, costs little or nothing, and gets more and more effective with continued use. Its end-user needn't be smart, rich, well educated, young, strong, nor mentally healthy to reap its considerable benefits. Listeners can be bone-tired, disgusted, depressed, disbelieving, listless, resistant, distracted, mentally disabled, physically unfit or at death's door, and imagery will still bestow its beneficent blessings.

In addition, it easily, comfortably and non-competitively supports other ongoing therapies, helping to anchor the inroads made by traditional counseling, just as easily as it helps to integrate the speedier gains of other nonverbal, imagery-based, "power therapies".

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