



healthy you

Relax

Use Guided Imagery to Reduce Stress

BY MELISSA DAVIS HALLER

YOU'VE HEARD IT BEFORE: Relax. Take deep, cleansing breathes. Think happy thoughts. You'll reduce stress and improve your health. Ummm. Sure.

With a job, bills, children, and a house that requires managing, doing nothing but breathing for an hour just doesn't seem productive.

But experts in the practice of guided imagery swear by this practice as a way to calm down and reduce the harmful effects of stress. It's often used to prepare patients for surgery or fight illness. But it can work for anyone.

"When you're in a deeply relaxed state, your body isn't producing stress hormones that wreak havoc on your body and cause depression and anxiety," says Bonnie Crawford, program director at the Wellness Community in Cincinnati. Studies show

that participating in guided imagery can boost the immune response, too. From lowering blood pressure to increasing our sense of gratitude, the benefits are widespread, adds Julie Douglas-Kippins, a craniosacral therapist who runs guided imagery programs at Cincinnati's Alliance Institute for Integrative Medicine.

That's worth your time, isn't it? Think about it: For a busy person, many (or most) of the thoughts you have all day center on what you need to do, haven't done, or might confront. How often do you envision great outcomes or see yourself relaxing on the beach or doing the things you love?

Energy healing

The ancient art of energy healing is a non-invasive therapy that focuses on manipulating your energy field, or 'life force' to reduce stress, increase energy and physical health, create a sense of calm and peacefulness, and leave you with an improved sense of well-being, according to Sharon Louallen a practitioner of Energy Healing, Hypnotherapy and Feng Shui. "Energy healing is an ancient knowledge that enforces the belief that we can heal ourselves," she explained. "The human body and spirit is meant to heal on its own, with the catalyst to change through our own design. We just need to be given instruction as to how to do that." According to Sharon living this lifestyle will enhance your overall functioning, while rejuvenating, restoring and aligning the balances between mind, body, and spirit. Energy healing treats imbalances in neck and back pain, emotional stress, anxiety, phobias and addictions, weight and skin problems, digestion, PMS, nutritional needs and



other areas of concern. Sometimes different elements are used: Crystal Healing, Charka Mapping, Reiki Healing, Aromatherapy, Massage Therapy, Gem & Color Therapy, Ayurveda Medicine, Visualizations, and Mineral Baths. For more information, www.healingisnow.com.

GUIDED IMAGERY BASICS

Try it. It's a good idea to attend at least one guided imagery session with a director who will suggest scenes to focus on and teach you techniques. But it's easy to try the basics any time of the day:

- ▶ **ASSUME** a comfortable but consistent stance, like cross-legged with thumb and forefinger touching;
- ▶ **CLOSE** your eyes and take deep, slow breaths
- ▶ **CREATE** a clear picture of what you want to happen. If you're stressed about an upcoming project, imagine you've just presented it and your boss is thrilled. Or envision yourself on a warm beach with the sound of waves crashing
- ▶ **USE** all the senses: sight, sound, and emotions
- ▶ **KEEP** thoughts positive



For additional help, buy guided imagery CDs on Amazon.com or ask your health care provider.