

Stress Management: Guided Imagery

Guided imagery is a simple process that uses your imagination to communicate with your body. Images and experiences created in your mind can be as real as actual events. Your body will react as though the experience is happening; for example, if your mind is picturing a relaxing experience in a relaxing place, your body will react by releasing the healthy hormones and biochemicals that help your body rest and restore itself.

Guided Imagery Steps:

A. Create your images

The imagery you use can be any scene where you feel relaxed. It can be a place you have been to or a relaxing scene you imagine. It can be indoors or out in nature. Choose something that is calming for you. Fill in as many details as possible. Think about the temperature in the air, the sounds, smells, the relaxing sights around you and any physical sensations you feel. Here are some sample visualizations:

- **Your raft.** It's a warm day. You are lying on your back on a raft, drifting in the shade of the trees along the shore. You trail your fingers in the cool water, relaxing completely. You are floating gently on the water, watching the clouds drift across the sky. It's very comfortable. You lie there as long as you want, just feeling relaxed.
- **Crackling fire.** You are sitting indoors by a warm fire, wrapped in blankets. Outside, a cold rain falls. You hear only the sound of crackling logs and see the flicker of the flames. You feel the warmth on your face and it relaxes and soothes all of your muscles. You are feeling comfortable, calm and relaxed.

These are just two examples of visualizations. Choose your own place of peace.

B. Give it a try

1. Position your body in a way that feels comfortable to you.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Take a few deep breaths; use techniques from the Deep Breathing handout if you have it nearby.
4. Take a moment to imagine yourself in your relaxing scene.

PLEASE NOTE: Visualization is best done with closed eyes. If you are uncomfortable with having your eyes closed, that is okay. Consider doing the exercise with your eyes half-closed or all the way open. Deep breathing or other relaxation techniques can still work with your eyes open.

Wellness Center

Fit. Ready. Resilient.

5. Put yourself in the scene. Use your senses to experience the relaxing sights, sounds, smells, textures and physical sensations.
6. Allow yourself to relax. Focus your attention on the peaceful calm of this place.
7. Continue to focus your attention on the details of the scene and the feelings of calm that come with this imagery.

C. Give yourself permission

It might be hard to do this exercise at first or you may think visualization is a waste of time, but mental timeouts are important for your health. Give yourself permission to visualize. See if you can stay with the image for at least 60 seconds. If you find your attention getting pulled away by distractions, gently bring your awareness back to the scene. With practice, it will become natural and relaxing. If you are prone to falling asleep, set a timer to alert you after a few minutes.

Once you have found an image that's a good fit, use the space below to jot down some notes about your scene. This is a place you can come back to whenever you need a moment to de-stress.

Notes:

Source: [U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs](#)