

Use Guided Imagery For Relaxation

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You may have heard of guided imagery as a stress management technique, but do you know how it works, why it's useful, and how it measures up against other stress relievers? Guided imagery is widely used for Guided imagery is an effective stress management technique and has remained popular for several reasons. It can quickly calm your body and simultaneously relax your mind. It's pleasant to practice, and not overly difficult or intimidating to learn. And it can help you to de-stress in minutes, but can also be a useful strategy for maintaining resilience toward stress during difficult times. If this sounds like something you can use in your life, read more about when guided imagery is used, and how it may be a useful go-to stress reliever for you.

Guided Imagery is a convenient and simple relaxation technique that can help you quickly and easily [manage stress and reduce tension in your body](#). It's virtually as easy as indulging in a vivid daydream and, with practice, this technique can help you to better access your inner wisdom.

There are a few different ways to practice using guided imagery, including taking a class where you are "guided" by an instructor, using audio recordings, creating your own recordings, or using your inner voice and imagination. Here we'll examine the benefits and drawbacks of this simple and engaging stress management technique and explore how it compares to other methods so you can determine how guided imagery may fit into your life. Then we'll delve into the practice of guided imagery and the different ways of using it. We'll look at methods of using your own thoughts, simply because this takes the least amount of preparation and expense; however, you can also explore guided imagery at many yoga studios, with recordings, and through an experienced therapist. You can also record your own guided imagery tapes. First, let's take a closer look at the practice itself.

Guided Imagery's Effects on the Body

Guided imagery has been found to provide significant stress reduction benefits, including physically relaxing the body quickly and efficiently and even helping participants get in touch with deeper levels of wisdom (held on a subconscious level) that would help them better manage their lives in ways that would reduce stress. The studies demonstrating the health benefits of imagery are so numerous that many hospitals are incorporating imagery as an option to help with treatment. Fortunately, it's a simple enough technique that it can be used at home as well, with positive results.

What's Involved?

With the help of a guided imagery recording, a professional helper, or just one's own imagination, those who practice guided imagery get into a deeply relaxed state and envision, with great detail relating to all of the senses, a relaxing scene. This scene may be something in the natural world like a beautiful waterfall in Hawaii with sparkling and refreshing water at the bottom or a cool and dense forest where you may take a calming walk in your imagination. It could also be a relaxing or happy event such as a vividly-imagined scene where you discover a \$50 bill on the sidewalk and eat a delicious meal in a restaurant by the beach, or win the lottery and buy whatever you want.

Those who use guided imagery for stress relief may also imagine a wise 'guide' with them, answering their questions and asking them questions that they must ponder in order to get to a better place in their lives. (This 'guide' is a representation of their subconscious mind that they aren't generally able to access.)

What Are the Pros?

Imagery can provide relaxation, insight, and wisdom. It is a free stress-relieving therapy and, with practice, can be done just about anywhere. It can help you to relieve physical tension and psychological stress at the same time, distracting you from what may be stressing you, and getting you into a more positive frame of mind. In this way, it can also be useful in

disrupting [patterns of rumination](#) and can help you to build resources in your life that increase your resilience toward stress by engaging an [upward spiral of positivity](#).

What Are the Cons?

Like [self-hypnosis](#), it can take some practice to master autonomous guided imagery. Working with a professional therapist to get to that point can be somewhat costly, but worthwhile. Alternatively, there are many downloadable recordings you can use to get started or follow the simple instructions in this article on guided imagery.

How Does It Compare to Other Stress Reduction Methods?

For the benefits it provides, it's an excellent stress management option. It can be easier than exercise or even [yoga](#) for those with physical limitations. It has no risk of side effects like some medical and herbal therapies. Using it for simple relaxation is easy and can be done by just about anyone, but accessing an internal 'guide' takes more practice than other methods like [progressive muscle relaxation](#) or breathing exercises. It's similar to self-hypnosis in that you're getting into a deep state of relaxation and dealing with your subconscious mind. However, with self-hypnosis, you're more often implanting ideas into your subconscious mind, whereas imagery focuses more on extracting ideas from it.

Practicing Guided Imagery:

Now that you understand the basics of this stress management tool, let's get into how you can practice it. The following are general guidelines to help you understand the process of guided

imagery, and be able to practice it on your own. Here's how to make guided imagery practice work for you.

Get Comfortable

Get into a relaxed position, like the one you would use for [meditation](#) or self-hypnosis. If a lying-down position would likely put you to sleep, opt for a cross-legged position or recline in a comfortable chair. Try to position yourself in a way where your physical comfort won't be a distraction.

Breathe From Your Belly

Use diaphragmic [deep breathing](#) and close your eyes, focusing on "breathing in peace and [breathing out stress](#)." This means letting your belly expand and contract with your breath--if you find your shoulders rising and falling, you are likely carrying tension in your body and not breathing in the most relaxed way.

Choose a Scene and Vividly Imagine It

Once you get to a relaxed state, begin to envision yourself in the midst of the most relaxing environment you can imagine. For some, this would be floating in the cool, clear waters off of a remote tropical island, where attractive people bring drinks and smooth music plays in the background. For others, this might be sitting by a fire in a secluded snow cabin, deep in the woods, sipping hot cocoa and reading the latest bestseller while wrapped in a plush blanket and fuzzy slippers.

You may want to remember a time and place when you felt wonderful and relaxed (a "happy place" in your memory), a vividly-described scene from a book you love, or the way you imagine a place you've always wanted to visit.

Immerse Yourself In Sensory Details

As you imagine your scene, try to involve all of your senses. What does it look like? How does it feel? What special scents are involved? Do you hear the roar of a fire, the splash of a waterfall, or the sounds of chipper birds? Make your vision so real you can even taste it! (Noticing these details in your daily life is a way to [increase your mindfulness](#), which brings lasting stress management benefits as well.)

Relax

Stay here for as long as you like. Enjoy your 'surroundings', and let yourself be far from what stresses you. When you're ready to come back to reality, count back from ten or twenty, and tell yourself that when you get to 'one', you'll feel serene and alert, and enjoy the rest of your day. When you return, you'll feel calmer and refreshed, like returning from a mini-vacation, but you won't have left the room!

Tips

1. You may want to use ambient sounds that compliment your imagery. This way, you feel more immersed in your 'environment', plus the sounds of real-life will be obscured.
2. You may also want to set an alarm, just in case you lose track of time or fall asleep. This way, you'll be more able to relax and let go, knowing that your schedule won't be in jeopardy.
3. As you get more practiced, you'll be able to go more deeply and quickly. You may also want to communicate with your subconscious mind, with the help of a tape you record for yourself or purchase, or a therapist.