

Therapeutic Playaways: Criteria on Indications and Contraindications, Desired Outcomes & Delivery of Guided Imagery and Mindfulness Audio Programs

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This is a summary of the indications and contraindications for using guided imagery, specifically the cases when the desired outcomes can best be achieved when content is delivered via a Therapeutic Playaway all-in-one audio device. Playaways are pre-loaded with guided imagery audio programs and, in many situations, help Veterans achieve better results when compared with digital downloads, computers, and other devices.

Criteria on Indications and Contraindications for Use of a Playaway

In what follows, Belleruth Naparstek, LISW, BCD provides an update to the *Indications and Contraindications for Guided Imagery*®, created for the 2-year, Arizona Center for Integrative Medicine Fellowship Program and used to train over 1,000 national and international leaders in Integrative Medicine.

Indications

- Imagery is a choice intervention for patients facing medical procedures - childbirth, surgery, chemotherapy, radiotherapy, dialysis, cardiac catheterization, MRIs, colonoscopies, biopsies, fertility procedures, and the like. (Studies at Blue Shield and at New York Presbyterian showed that the more anxious the patient, the higher the adoption rate and the more beneficial the response. Additionally, where on most occasions there is higher adoption by women than men, when it comes to pre-surgery patients, there is no difference. Utilization rates are about 75% for both genders.)
- For any patient looking to be a more proactive participant in his or her own health care, for any condition, imagery is a strong intervention. Guided imagery engages patients, puts them in charge of when, where, and how often to use it, and counters the anxiety and loss of self-esteem that can come from being rendered passive, helpless, and at the mercy of a health care system and its professionals.
- Imagery is an excellent adjuvant treatment tool for most mental health concerns: depression, anxiety, panic, phobias, grief, acute and chronic stress, posttraumatic stress, addiction, anger management and anxiety-based compulsive behaviors. It works powerfully and collaboratively with other treatments *without competing with them*. There is some evidence to show that it may be especially useful for conditions that involve involuntary dissociated states as it trains listeners to deploy a form of dissociation at will in a positive, directed, and choiceful way.

- Imagery has a proven track record for supporting smoking cessation, weight loss, and recovery from alcohol and other chemical substances. It also works well in conjunction with 12-step and other recovery programs.
- Cardiac, hypertension, CHF, and diabetes patients achieve good results from the stress-relieving properties of imagery. (However, these are also the patients who are more likely to fall into the category of “Type A’s.” They may get fidgety, irritated, or stressed when faced with an expectation to sit still and relax. Selecting guided walking or moving meditations may serve these patients better.)
- This is a good choice for patients seeking a non-narcotic intervention for insomnia and many kinds of sleep disturbance; and for those already considered too vulnerable to chemical dependency on opioids. It can work alongside medication and, not infrequently, is seen to reduce or even replace it.
- Imagery is effective at soothing and calming patients suffering from Alzheimer’s disease and other kinds of dementia. The nonverbal elements - voice tone, pacing, and music - reach these patients, even if the cognitive content does not.
- Asthma, COPD, and lung cancer patients do well with imagery. The relaxation assists with breathing.
- Patients with functional pain conditions including fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue, irritable bowel, TMJ, lower back pain, pelvic pain, RSD, and the like respond well to guided imagery.
- Imagery helps osteoarthritis patients, complementing standard treatment and further helping to reduce pain, alleviate stiffness, and increase range of motion.
- Stroke, TBI, post-surgical patients, and others engaged in the rehab process can advance their PT and OT gains and reduce deficits with “mental imagery”. In cases where actual movement is premature or producing too much pain and risk of injury, guided imagery can be used safely as a place holder, advancing progress until movement is possible. There is a spate of recent research establishing the value of this kind of motor imagery to support rehab.
- For patients encountering medical procedures and surgeries, guided imagery has been shown to reduce anxiety, blood loss, length of hospital stay, nausea, fatigue, and the need for medication. It also lowers cost per procedure and produces increased patient resiliency, optimism, relaxation, and confidence in the medical team.

Possible Contraindications

- Guided imagery is not recommended for patients with paranoid schizophrenia.
- It should not be imposed on anyone who is made more anxious by having to sit still and relax. There are other effective treatments that are more compatible with the patient’s nature, which can achieve the same ends.

- Caution should be exercised when working with trauma survivors given that some may be flooded with anxiety when imagery is introduced. These patients may do better with a selection of audio programs with simple progressive relaxation, breath-counting, or mantra repeating exercises; or by working with biofeedback or other less emotionally evocative techniques.
- Some people may be challenged and even overwhelmed by imaginative efforts and clinical judgment should be exercised before employing techniques including guided imagery.
- Patients with hearing deficits may be frustrated by guided imagery, especially elderly patients with hearing loss in the lower registers who may not be able to hear the narrative over the music. For some this is very frustrating. Others don't care and relax anyway, through the music, voice tone, and pacing.

Desired Mental Health Outcomes

Below are some of the ways guided imagery supports our Veterans' return to optimal functioning and enhances their recovery and emotional resilience. Outcomes for medical procedures are listed separately.

- Better management of chronic pain.
- Reduced anxiety.
- Deeper, longer lasting, and more restorative sleep.
- Greater sense of well-being, hope, and optimism; decreased cynicism.
- Greater sense of self-efficacy and agency; increased motivation to move forward with goals.
- Fewer, shorter, and less intense depressive episodes.
- Better ability to manage emotional reactivity including panic, anger, grief, and discouragement.
- Greater confidence and ability to perform daily tasks.
- Fewer and less intense episodes of intrusive thoughts, flashbacks, and nightmares.¹
- Less social isolation and avoidance.
- Improved relationships with family, co-workers, and friends.
- Greater control over behavior, including physical aggression.
- Reduced dependence on alcohol and drugs; help with fighting addiction.
- More emotional availability, to self and in relationships.
- A new or returned connection to inner spirituality and the sense of reassurance and comfort that can come with it.

¹ This, along with reduction in all symptom clusters as measured by PTSD Checklist, reduced Beck depression scores, decreased cynicism on Cook-Medley Hostility Inventory, and improved Quality of Life, in Jain S, McMahon G, Pasen P, Kozub M, Porter V, King R, Guarneri E. Healing Touch with Guided Imagery for PTSD in Returning Active Duty Military: A Randomized, Controlled Trial, *Military Medicine*, 177, 9:1015, 2012, conducted with Health Journeys Healing Trauma guided imagery.

Desired Outcomes for Medical Procedures

Therapeutic Playaways are ideal for generating improved outcomes with various medical procedures, such as surgery, chemotherapy, radiologic treatment and diagnostic procedures, bone marrow transplantation, dialysis, cardiac catheterization, needle biopsies, wound stitching, ventilator removal and even procedures involved in sustaining a healthy pregnancy and delivery. Desired outcomes include:

- Reduced appointment cancellations and rescheduling due to anticipatory anxiety.
- Reduced patient anxiety before, during, and after procedures. Reduce need to sedate.
- Increased patient comfort and relaxation leading to greater compliance, fewer delays, and higher rates of successful completion.
- Reinforced confidence in the medical team. (This message is embedded in all guided imagery content for medical procedures.)
- Increased feelings of relaxation and confidence during procedures.
- Reduced adverse side effects such as fatigue, soreness, nausea, pain, etc.
- Reduced pain, pre- and post-op anxiety, length of hospital stay, blood loss, and use of opioids.²
- Reduced anxiety, increased member satisfaction, reduced length of stay, reduced pharmaceutical and per procedure costs in 995 Blue Shield of CA HMO members; cost per procedure savings of \$2003.³

Delivery Methods

Below are circumstances where the all-in-one audio player (Playaway) offers distinct benefits over other formats.

- When a simple, one-step/one-item process is needed for successful follow-through. For instance, with the cognitive impairment that sometimes accompanies PTSD and/or TBI, the simplicity of Playaway makes it a best practice delivery system.
- For patient's dealing with the mind fog of severe depression or the overwhelming nature of incapacitating anxiety, the simple, one-step Playaway is the delivery method of choice.
- With patients who are easily distracted, hypervigilant, or frequently thrown off focus, it is best to get them away from listening to guided imagery on their smart phones, where the bells, whistles and buzzes of incoming emails and text messages can prematurely pull them from their therapeutic meditative state and back to the cares and worries of daily life.

² From RCT with 335 surgery patients at UC Davis and Penn State. Dreher H. Mind-body interventions for surgery: evidence and exigency. *Advances In Mind Body Medicine* 1998;14:207-222. Conducted with Health Journey's "Successful Surgery."

³ Schwab D1, Davies D, Bodtker T, Anaya L, Johnson K, Chaves M. A study of efficacy and cost-effectiveness of guided imagery as a portable, self-administered, pre-surgical intervention delivered by a health plan. *Adv Mind Body Med*. 2007 Summer;22(1):8-14. Conducted with Health Journey's "Successful Surgery".

- Even a focused person can be distracted by incoming text or calls when listening on a smart phone. They too are prematurely yanked out of their therapeutic meditative state and back to the cares and worries of daily life.
- There is a 'security blanket' effect that comes with vets having their own, personal, self-soothing/self-regulating device with them, felt palpably as an actual item, with weight and mass, in their pocket.
- To quote a VA-prescribing Advance Practice Nurse, “I believe being able to put a small, portable device immediately in the hands of my patients or send them out when I do tele-video sessions has been an enhancement to the therapeutic relationship. The Veteran feels both heard and acknowledged for their suffering for a small price.”
- Veterans who are homeless or impoverished may not have a smart phone, CD player, or Internet access. Playaways provide the therapist with a cost-effective and complete solution for administering a therapeutic audio program to these individuals.
- The Playaway is a vital lifeline to Veterans making emergency calls to crisis hotlines, who live in isolated areas or locations with few mental health resources to turn to. Emergency call centers, such as MedCell at Quantico, use the overnight shipping of Playaways all over the U.S. as a powerful “*Hold on, help is coming*” message to Veteran Marines in danger of committing suicide or other violent acts, or who are just feeling desperate. They can then call the next day to follow up on efficacy.