

# Outcomes of Guided Imagery in Patients Receiving Radiation Therapy for Breast Cancer

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Guided imagery is an established intervention in integrative oncology. This study was initiated to evaluate the impact of guided imagery on patients undergoing radiation therapy for breast cancer. Eligible patients receiving guided imagery sessions were monitored via biofeedback before and after each session. Monitored measures included blood pressure, respiration rate, pulse rate, and skin temperature. In addition, the EuroQoL Group's EQ-5D questionnaire was used for subjective assessment and patient feedback was collected at the end of radiation therapy through a satisfaction survey. Measured parameters revealed statistically significant improvement from baseline, with decreases noted in respiration rate and pulse rate as well as systolic and diastolic blood pressure. Skin temperature increased, indicating more peripheral capillary flow secondary to a decrease in the sympathetic response. Overall, 86% of participants described the guided imagery sessions as helpful, and 100% said they would recommend the intervention to others. The results of this study illustrate the positive impact of guided imagery as measured through subjective and objective parameters. Improving the overall care for patients with breast cancer supports the value of incorporating practices of integrative oncology into standard practice.

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The recognition of the importance of integrative medicine to cancer care is increasing. Guided imagery (GI) is one of the most useful tools of mind/body medicine and is a featured modality of the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine practices. In the practice of mind/body techniques, GI involves the use of imagination to invoke one or more of the senses. GI leads an individual through experiences in the mind to access the physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions that effect physiologic change, modulating the individual's response (Achterberg, 1985). The sensory components that modulate an individual's response are visual, auditory, olfactory, gustatory, and kinesthetic experiences (proprioceptive awareness). The response of an individual's sensory component will vary from

person to person; a person's sensory response may be a single sense experience, such as a visual image of waves on a beach, or a combination of the senses, such as an auditory response like the sounds of the waves while visually experiencing the beach. The sensory responses are dependent on a person's memory—the conscious and unconscious thought patterns.

Various imagery techniques are applied to elicit calmness and a sense of space to alleviate anxiety and pain (Spiegel, 1993). GI could be a customized one-to-one session or provided through a generalized CD. A customized GI session is helpful in coaching an individual through his or her reflective thoughts and emotions. Another approach of GI is to assist a person toward positive goal outcomes (i.e., the mental rehearsing prior to diagnostic examinations and surgery).