

## What is Guided Imagery?

Guided Imagery is a relaxation technique aimed at easing stress and promoting a sense of peace and tranquility at a stressful or difficult time in a person's life. It can be used by young children all the way up through the elderly.

Guided Imagery has been shown to promote wellness and optimize overall health.

Anxiety is reduced by up to 65%, and it has been shown to decrease pain and bring a person to a state of tranquility in a matter of minutes.

Research has also shown that stimulating the brain through imagery may have a direct effect on both the endocrine and nervous systems, which lead to changes in immune system function.

Guided Imagery is a simple, low cost, and effective tool for stress reduction and stress management. It can be used for a variety of issues including:

- Anxiety, fears, insomnia, and stressful situations
- Reduction of pain
- Work related stress
- Preparation for procedures or surgery
- Heart disease
- Prenatal through pregnancy
- Addictions for adults and teens
- Learning Disabilities
- Post Traumatic Stress
- Weight loss and smoking cessation
- Anger management

The world renowned benchmark research study at The Cleveland Clinic Foundation and Washington Hospital Center in the 90's brought Guided Imagery to the forefront for health care, corporations, schools and everyday homes for health maintenance.

Most importantly, Guided Imagery gives a person back control of their life. They are able to settle down and sleep better.

According to the Washington, D.C.-based American Society of Interior Designers (ASID), the goal of health care interior design is to "create environments that improve patient health and well-being, making patients and caregivers feel at ease." But traditionally, according to one expert, "health care design has focused on function, efficiency, and technology at the expense of patients' psychological needs." There is, however, a growing body of scientific evidence indicating that environmental characteristics influence patient health, and ultimately financial bottom-lines.

One of the leading voices promoting healing environments is The Center for Health Design, a non-profit organization. Founded in 1988, the Center's stated goal is to "demonstrate that supportive building design can enhance health and well-being." One member of the Center, interior designer Jain Malkin, is a best-selling author whose seminal 1992 book, *Hospital Interior Architecture*, has had a significant impact on the industry. Malkin reports that the ultimate goal in designing healing environments is to reduce stress. According to Malkin, traditional patient rooms don't work, leaving a need for corrective "life-enhancing features."

In an article for the November 1992 issue of *Aesclepius* (National Symposium on Healthcare Design), Malkin writes: “Real art ...expresses energy, life force, and has deep spiritual meaning that can help the viewer transform pain and suffering...the benefit of a well-designed health care setting is that it allows the patient to relax so that medications and therapies can be more effective.”

A Texas-based consulting firm, American Art Resources (AAR), works exclusively with the health care industry to develop therapeutic environments. American Art Resources was selected by the American Hospital Association (AHA) to write the definitive art standards and guidelines for health care settings. In a 1993 article in *Healthcare Interior Finishes* the current president of AAR wrote: “In addition to image enhancement, art can provide an important therapeutic element in the health care environment. Art’s ability to provide solace, inspiration and hope makes it an indispensable element of the total health care environment.”

In today’s budget-conscious health care climate, there has been a growing recognition that health care administrators are interested in costs and clinical outcomes, as well as patient care. An article entitled “10 Myths of Healing Environments: A Healthy Space Doesn’t Have to be a Huge Headache” (*Health Facilities Magazine, AHA, February 1998*) states “creating healing environments, which should be considered as part of an integrated health care system, is a developing art and science. The increasing number of studies point to a link between supportive environments and healthier patients, which in turn leads to better outcomes...people heal faster in low stress conditions.”

Other research shows the effects of nature on stress and healing, and more significantly, that patients desire to be in contact with nature. In a 1998 study on consumer perceptions of health care environments, The Center for Health Design found that patients want an “environment conducive to well being, achieved by proximity to nature.”

“In Harmony with Nature’s Blueprint” published in *Interior Expressions (February 2000)*, Jain Malkin writes the “effect of nature on humans has been thoroughly studied... humans have physiological and emotional responses to nature.”

In recent years, Roger Ulrich, Ph.D., environmental psychologist, director of the Center for Health Systems and Design, College of Architecture, Texas A&M University, and a leading authority in the field has expounded his “Theory of Supportive Design.” Access to nature is central to this theory. The underlying premise is that “improved medical outcomes are linked to environments’ effectiveness in facilitating stress coping and restoration. Supportive design tries to eliminate stress factors and to include features that reduce stress, calm patients, strengthen coping resources... including access to nature.”

Ulrich has cited numerous studies showing that “viewing nature can produce significant recovery from stress, which in turn, can lead to cost-savings, by improving medical outcomes,” going as far back as a 1984 Science paper which stated: “patients with bedside views of nature had briefer hospital stays and needed less medication.” In a September 2000 presentation titled “Evidence-based Environmental Design for Improving Medical Outcomes,” Ulrich argued that “exposure to nature produces significant recovery.” Both psychological and physiological stress reduction are noted, as measured by “less anxiety, calmness, reduced blood pressure, muscle tension, heart and respiratory rates.”

Finally, another alternative approach gaining credibility is chromo therapy or color therapy. This developing area of holistic therapy states that color, through sensors in the body, brings about emotional reactions in viewers, and has the potential to promote health, balance and well being. A white paper for the Center for Health Design titled “Color is More than a Whim” (August 2002) makes the case for “caring color” and states that the consideration of color therapy is currently undervalued and underutilized in the health care, but it is an easy and inexpensive tool to use.