

Therapies

Acupuncture | Art Therapy | Counselling | Healing
Imagery | Massage | Meditation and Mindfulness
Music Therapy | Nordic Walking | Physical Activity
Qigong | Reflexology | Relaxation | Shiatsu | Yoga



Imagery involves using your imagination to create an experience or scenario in your mind. It usually takes place sitting or lying down and may involve listening to an instructor or CD. It can also be used as a self-help technique.

Imagery is used to help with side-effects of cancer and its treatment such as nausea, stress and anxiety. Some people who have tried imagery said they felt it helped them to relax and improved their mood.

Studies have shown that imagery can help improve the quality of life of those living with cancer.

Information on imagery

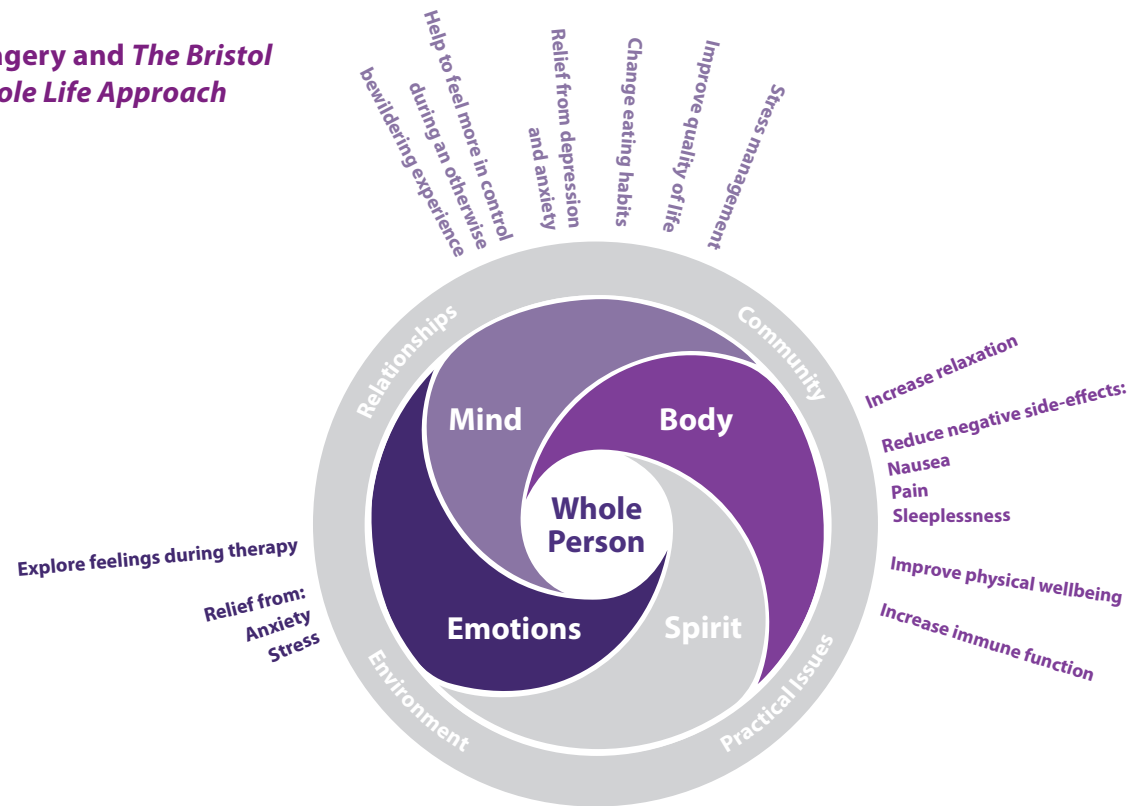
This evidence-based information sheet aims to provide clearly sourced and reliable information to help you make informed choices about imagery, one of a range of complementary therapies available to support people with cancer. If you would like more information on how to access the range of services Penny Brohn UK provides, please contact our Helpline on 0303 3000 118. We are able to provide our services free of charge, thanks to the charitable donations and voluntary contributions which fund our work.

What do people who have tried imagery say about it?

Research studies known as qualitative studies ask people about their experiences. They can provide information from a personal perspective, but can't tell us if a therapy is likely to work for everyone.

In one study researchers asked people with cancer about their experiences of guided imagery. They felt that they benefitted from the distraction it provided and it helped them to achieve a relaxed state. In another study people said that imagery became easier with practice. With this increased practice, people noticed that it positively affected their mood.

Imagery and The Bristol Whole Life Approach



This adaptation of *The Bristol Whole Life Approach* wheel shows the areas that imagery can help with, according to providers.

(Please note that these are not the claims of Penny Brohn UK.)

What happens in an imagery session?

- Imagery can be led by a therapist or you can use a pre-recorded CD at home.
- You can practise imagery whilst sitting or lying down.
- When using a CD or being led by a therapist, this is known as "guided imagery". Once taught, imagery may also be used as a self-help technique.
- The most common type of imagery used is "active" imagery. This is where you create an experience or scenario in your mind. You may focus on pleasant

experiences, such as being in a beautiful landscape or garden, or on a process such as activating the immune system, or an outcome such as being completely well.

- For some people their visual strength is not as strong and for them it may be more effective to use sounds or sensations during imagery sessions.
- At the end of the session, the therapist may spend some time listening to your experiences and exploring what they mean to you.

More about imagery

Imagery uses the creative imagination to positively affect health and wellbeing. It is a self-help technique, which includes not just visual images but also smells, sounds, tastes, textures and touch. These experiences are consciously constructed in the mind, with the intention of influencing physical, emotional and psychological wellbeing. Imagery may also be referred to as 'visualisation'.

Imagery has been used traditionally by many cultures across the world. People from Egyptian, Greek and Chinese traditions practised imagery, as well as people from religions such as Hinduism and Judaism and pagan religions such as Wicca.

Imagery became popular in the West during the second half of the 20th century, not just to help with physical ailments, but as a way of self-improvement. Its use for people with cancer became popular in the 1970s, when it was taught to small groups in the US by the Simontons, a husband-wife partnership of an oncologist and psychologist.

Imagery is now commonly used alongside other techniques such as healing, meditation and relaxation.

Is imagery safe?

There are no known side-effects of imagery. Avoid driving or operating machinery whilst listening to imagery CDs or practising self-guided imagery. Imagery may not be suitable for those with certain psychological conditions. Please talk to a therapist if you are in any doubt.

Are there any legal issues?

There is currently no formal regulation of therapists offering imagery. Most practitioners have training in another therapy. For example, many psychotherapists, psychologists and counsellors use imagery.

What is the evidence on imagery?

Research suggests that imagery may improve people's quality of life. Other research found conflicting results. There is mixed evidence for all of the following: anxiety, depression, nausea and vomiting, stress, psychological and emotional responses, pain reduction and immune function. Because the approach used in each case was not the same, and often did

not reflect how imagery could be best used, more research must be done to give a clear picture of the benefits of imagery.

A full list of references and an extended summary of the research literature is available upon request from our Helpline.

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Statement

Our information and research is designed to help you make informed choices about the services that we provide. From time to time, for illustrative purposes, we may make reference to commonly available products (such as relaxation CDs and popular self-help books). We do not endorse or advertise the use of any specific product.

Disclaimer:

While we make every effort to use up-to-date and reliable sources, we cannot accept liability for errors in the sources that we use and also cannot guarantee to find all the information relevant to your enquiry or request. All responsibility for interpretation of and action upon that information rests with you. This information and advice is offered on the understanding that if you intend to support your treatment with complementary or alternative approaches, then it is advisable to consult your medical team to ensure that they have a complete understanding of your situation and the complementary or alternative approach that you are considering.

Organisations that offer support and information for people with cancer

Cancer Research UK

Tel: 0808 800 4040

www.cancerresearchuk.org

Macmillan Cancer Support

Tel: 0808 808 0000

www.macmillan.org.uk

NHS 111

Tel: 111

www.nhs.uk

More information on complementary therapies

NHS Evidence

www.evidence.nhs.uk

CAM Cancer

www.cam-cancer.org/CAM-Summaries