

Relaxation and imagery and cognitive-behavioral training reduce pain during cancer treatment

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Relaxation and guided imagery are found to reduce treatment-related pain (from mouth sores) in bone marrow transplant patients at the renowned Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle.. Researchers at the renowned Fred Hutchinson Cancer Research Center in Seattle published a study that looked at pain levels from mouth sores in 94 bone marrow transplant patients. The patients were randomly divided into four groups: (1) treatment as usual control, (2) therapist support, (3) relaxation and imagery training, and (4) training in a package of cognitive-behavioral coping skills which included relaxation and imagery. All groups received 2 training sessions prior to treatment and then twice a week "booster" sessions for the first 5 weeks of treatment.

Results showed that, as hypothesized, the patients who received either relaxation and imagery alone, or those who received the package of cognitive-behavioral coping skills, reported less pain than the patients in the other 2 groups.

Interestingly, however, the researcher's second hypothesis, that the cognitive-behavioral skills package, with its additional components, would have a greater effect beyond the relaxation and imagery intervention alone, did not bear out.

The study concludes that relaxation and imagery training reduces cancer treatment-related pain; and that adding cognitive-behavioral skills training to the relaxation with imagery does not, on average, further improve pain relief.

Citation: Syrjala KL, Donaldson GW, Davis MW, Kippes ME, Carr JE. Relaxation and imagery and cognitive-behavioral training reduce pain during cancer treatment: a controlled clinical trial. Pain. 1995 Nov;63(2):189-98