

Preparing for Surgery and Recovery:
A “Mind – Body” Handbook for the Pre-surgical Patient



For pre surgical patients at UCI MC

INTRODUCTION

This handbook was created to assist you in preparing for and coping with the stress related to your upcoming surgery. By reading this handbook and practicing the techniques provided, you should experience greater peace of mind and an easier return to health.

Chapter 1

Surgery

Facing surgery can be very stressful. This stress can be uncomfortable and can actually undermine the immune system and the body's ability to heal. Your surgical outcome can be impacted by the way you deal with stress.

We would like to provide you with some simple information and coping skills which will assist you in your recovery from surgery. It has been found that people who are mentally and physically prepared for surgery generally have an easier experience because the body is more relaxed. Relaxed patients can endure more pain, require less medication and have shorter hospital stays.

In the following pages you will find information describing several stress reduction techniques that will help you prepare for your surgery and recovery.

Learning to relax

There are many ways to relax. You probably have a few favorites already; taking long walks, listening to music, gardening, taking a bath. We have a few new methods we would like you to try:

- deep breathing
- positive thoughts/affirmations
- meditation
- visualization and guided imagery.

"Repeated activation of the relaxation response can reverse sustained problems in the body and mend the internal wear and tear brought on by stress."

*~ Dr. Herbert Benson, **Timeless Healing***

CHAPTER 2

Deep Breathing

When tense, we made hold our breath or breathe shallowly. When we do this oxygen intake can be decreased. The first step in dealing with stress is to engage in deep, slow breathing.

Try this simple exercise a least once a day.

- Sit comfortably, with your back straight and your feet on the floor.
- Take a slow, deep inhalation to a count of four.
- Make sure you are breathing deeply enough place your hands on your lower abdomen (stomach) and push you hands OUT as you inhale (breathe in).
- Breathe out gently to a count of eight and feel your abdomen release.
- Exhale and imagine a feather floating to the ground.
- Do five cycles of this exercise and then sit quietly for a few moments and allow yourself to enjoy the feeling of calm.

Here is another breathing exercise you might like.

- Sit comfortably with your feet on the floor, take a deep breathe in.
- Exhale twice as long as you inhale.
- Inhale and say to yourself . . . "I Am."
- Feel your lungs as they fill and as your diaphragm extends down into your abdomen, feel your belly rise.
- Exhale and say to yourself . . . "Relaxed" and feel your belly fall.
- Inhale . . . "I am,"
- Exhale . . . "relaxed."
- Repeat ten cycles.

Once we have control of our breath we can turn to quieting our mind.

Relaxing the Mind

What we think, affects how we feel.

How we react to an event or the way we think about an event determines how anxious and tense we feel. Upsetting thoughts may actually increase your physical discomfort and slow your recovery.

Managing anxious thoughts

It is normal to be anxious before an operation, but you can learn some strategies to manage your thoughts and feelings.

Learn to create an empowering attitude

Negative thoughts reflect our worries and our fears. Instead of dismissing or ignoring our negative thoughts, it is much more helpful if we; identify and acknowledge them and then, change or replace them with a positive thought.

“You can’t stop the waves, but you can learn to surf.” Swami Satchitananda

Although we might not be able to change an event, we *can* change our reaction to the event. You can facilitate your healing by moving your attention from the illness, pain or injury to an image of health and success.

Listed below are examples of the types of common worries that plague different people. You may experience some, several, or none of these worries, or you may have other thoughts that trouble you.

Medical: fear of complications, postoperative pain, side effects of medications, lack of information, fear that you won’t really get better, or strong aversion to surgery.

Personal: concerns about ‘image,’ weight, menopause, sexuality, relationship with spouse, being ‘dependent’ on others.

Other: concerns about money, care of home and family, staying confined, embarrassment about surgery, or anger at need for surgery.

Changing your thoughts

It is normal for people to worry about their ability to deal with pain after surgery. How can you make your thoughts about pain more positive? Here are some examples:

I don’t know how I will deal with the pain after surgery.

Positive thought #1: Many people have had this same operation. They have managed the discomfort so I can manage it too.

Positive thought #2: I can tell the nurse when I feel uncomfortable. They are experts in pain management and they will give me the medication I need.

Some people worry that a serious problem might be uncovered during surgery. What positive thoughts could you use to replace this worry? Write down your thoughts and then when you are finished, look over some other positive thoughts listed below.

The surgeons might find something much worse once they have begun my surgery.

Positive thought #1: I have had checkups and tests that did not show any other problems, this is a very good sign that everything else is okay.

Positive thought #2: Other patients who have experienced the same symptoms have had the same surgery and done very well. I will too.

Positive thought #3: Thousands of these procedures are performed each year. It is pretty rare for unexpected problems to turn up.

Positive thought #4: If anything else does turn up, it can be treated right away, and then I will be in even better health afterwards, and that is good!

Practice positive thinking as much as you can (at least several times each day) in any setting. This can be helpful during your hospital stay and recovery at home.

Positive Statements and Affirmations for health and healing

Another method of promoting positive thinking is by repeating positive statements or affirmations. Affirmations should be positive and you should repeat them often to cement them in your mind and unconscious.. To do positive affirmations, you need to eliminate any negativity around you. This may mean going to a different room, on a walk, or finding a quiet space.

Some examples of affirmations for health and healing are . . .

- Every cell in my body vibrates with energy and health
- Loving myself heals my life. I nourish my mind, body and soul
- My body heals quickly and easily
- I know I deserve perfect health and I accept it now
- I choose to make positive healthy choices for myself
- I express my needs and feelings in a positive and healthy manner
- I trust in the healing processes of my body
- I have the power to control my health.
- I am in control of my health and wellness.
- I have abundant energy, vitality and well-being.
- I am healthy in all aspects of my being.
- I do not fear being unhealthy because I know that I control my own body.
- I am filled with energy to do all the daily activities in my life.
- My mind is at peace.
- I love and care for my body and it cares for me.
- It is natural for my body to heal itself.

As you say these phrases (out loud and to yourself), the affirmations become a part of your conscious, then subconscious thoughts. Repetition will drive them deeper into your being so that they become a vital part of you. You must affirm each day what you want in your life. Repeat to yourself : "I am a healthy being. It is normal to be healthy and vital. My health is part of my being." Soon, this will be the normal way you approach your health. Repeat any of these exercises as often as needed.

Meditation

Meditation is a mental discipline which allows one to enter a deeper state of relaxation or awareness. You can meditate by turning your attention to a single point such as a candle flame or by simply creating a more relaxed and peaceful frame of mind. The meditations described below will help you experience tranquility and relaxation.

Exercise #1 – Mindful Meditation

- Sit comfortably and quietly
- Center your attention on an object, such as a candle flame
- Allow thoughts to go through your mind but don't concentrate on them. Don't evaluate the thoughts or criticize yourself. No thought is an intrusion.
- Continue to focus on slow breathing and the candle flame, nothing else.

Exercise #2 – Concentration Meditation

Practicing yoga, tai chi or merely walking alone are all forms of meditation.

- Become aware of the movement of the body and the breath.
- As in the meditation above, quiet your mind and redirect any thoughts back to the breath and movement of the body

Meditation takes practice. Be patient and gentle with yourself as you learn this process.

Visualization and guided imagery

Visualization, or guided imagery, is a variation on traditional meditation that can help relieve stress.

Dr. Neil F. Neimark (author of *Less Stress Surgery a Guided Imagery Tape*) cites a review of the latest research showing *"that the best outcomes from pre-operative mind/body interventions are derived when the intervention involves specific 'training' of the body and mind."*

Use of guided imagery has been found to facilitate healing, assist in controlling acute or chronic pain, and decrease anxiety and fear.

When used as a relaxation technique, guided imagery involves imagining a scene in which you feel at peace, free to let go of all tension and anxiety. Choose whatever setting is most calming to you, whether a tropical beach, a favorite vacation spot, or a quiet wooded glen. You can do this visualization exercise on your own, with a therapist's help, or using an audio recording.

Close your eyes and let your worries drift away. Imagine your restful place. Picture it as vividly as you can—everything you can see, hear, smell, and feel. This will work best if you incorporate as many sensory details as possible. For example, if you are thinking about sitting on a dock on a quiet lake:

- **See** the sun setting over the water
- **Hear** the birds singing
- **Smell** the pine trees
- **Feel** the cool water on your bare feet
- **Taste** the fresh, clean air

The body's natural relaxation response is a powerful antidote to stress. Other methods of visualization involve creating mental pictures of stress flowing out of your body or of stress being folded away and placed in a padlocked chest

You can use imagery in rehearsal before a big event, allowing you to prepare for the event in your mind. (Athletes do this in preparation for a game or a race. They imagine the event and the end result with them as the victor.) Visualizations of this type allow you to pre-experience achievement of your goals and help you gain self-confidence.

Visualization exercise #1

Imagine yourself on a tropical beach. You are sitting in the warm white sand listening to the waves as they gently roll up onto the shore. You feel the sun on your body as you drink in breathes of clean air and the fresh scent of the surrounding palm trees and hibiscus flowers. You feel comfortable and safe. As you look up toward the high mountains behind you your body begins to tingle with a feeling of indescribable joy. For a few moments you are completely absorbed in your feelings. The warm sun is shining on you and you feel happy and at peace.

Visualization exercise #2

Sit with your back straight. Place your feet flat on the floor. Let your hands rest comfortably in your lap. Take a deep breath and, as you slowly exhale, let your eyes close and your body relax as deeply as possible.

Imagine yourself standing on a country lane on a warm, bright sunny day. Feel the warmth of the sun on your face and hands. Enjoy the warmth of the sun.

Slowly walk up the lane where it leads into a forest. Walk down the dirt path into the

forest. Continue as the lane leads you across a rustic wooden bridge. Below you is a small gurgling stream. As you walking over the stream, notice the trees on either side of the stream. Listen to the wind around you as it blows gently through the trees. The leaves are rustling and, as the breeze comes toward you, it brings with it the smells of the trees and woods. It's a very cool, clean, damp smell. You feel good as you fill your lungs with the cool air. Walk along the stream through the trees, and notice the different varieties of trees and the different intricacies of the bark. Look up through the intertwined limbs at the deep blue sky.

Now, the gurgling sounds of the stream draw your attention. And, as you look in the stream, leaves float past you, spinning and twirling. You have come to a large tree that overshadows a small waterfall. Sit down on a large, smooth rock that is next to the tree and stream.

As you sit on the rock, lean over the stream and look into a calm pool of water. Dip your hands into the cool water and bring the refreshing water to your face.

Now, sit back against the tree and let the sounds of the water and the breeze dancing through the grass and the trees fill your ears. Just enjoy the peacefulness and allow yourself to relax even more deeply.

With imagery, you substitute actual experience with scenes from your imagination. Your body reacts to these imagined scenes almost as if they were real. To relax with imagery, imagine a warm comfortable, safe and pleasant place and enjoy it in your imagination. Picture yourself recovered and well. Visualize radiant health. Imagine yourself exactly as you'd like to be – healthy, strong, solid, confident, graceful, relaxed, supple and poised.

Imagery is a potent method of stress reduction, especially when combined with physical relaxation methods such as deep breathing

Chapter 3

Resources

Informational websites

Your physician provides you a certain kind of support and information; your family and close friends provide another, and equally valuable, kind of support. Yet another important kind of support can be provided by other people who have had or are facing the same type of surgery. This kind of support can not take the place of your physician, nor of your family, but it can be of great help to you while you prepare for surgery and when you are in recovery. It can help you to anticipate problems, find solutions, validate your feelings, and obtain

useful advice. It can provide a different kind of companionship, and can help you to feel more 'understood'.

If you have access to the internet, there are many excellent sites you can access. These sites provide information about various surgical procedures and what to expect during your period of recovery. You can often read about other patients' experiences, their questions and concerns, and how they may have dealt with specific problems. It is an excellent place also for you to ask a question or bring up a concern.

CONCLUSION

Although surgery can be a stressful experience, there are, as you have been shown, many techniques you can use to help you cope. A calm relaxed focus on a positive outcome, will enhance your recovery. The attitude of the patient entering surgery is as important as the skill of the surgeon. Allow your mind-body-spirit to express the full range of its incredible power to heal. We hope that you will have a smooth recovery and that this is the beginning of a phase of good health and wellness for you.

"Through my research, I became convinced that beliefs have physical repercussions . . . That the human spirit is relevant, indeed influential, in the treatment and prevention of illness. In my thirty years of practicing medicine, I've found no healing force more impressive or more universally accessible than the power of the individual to care for and cure him or herself."

Herbert Benson, "Timeless Healing"