



# IN CARE OF KIDS

## Distraction, Relaxation and Imagery



Pain is one of the most difficult and scary parts about being in the hospital. There are lots of different medications your doctors and nurses might use to help control pain. In addition to medicine, there are many other things you and your child can do together to help control his/her pain. Some of these things include **distraction, relaxation, and imagery.**

### Distraction

Distraction is simply finding something that is so fun or interesting that it 'takes your mind off the pain.' This technique can be very useful for many different types of pain. It includes such things as:

Infants	Toddlers	Preschoolers	School age	Teenagers
Soft touch			Child as "special helper"	Helping to make decisions.
Soft soothing voice/music	Puppets		Video games or music	
Pacifier/bottle	Music/Singing		Counting	
Gentle rocking	Pop-up books		Reading	
Mobiles	Magic wands		Preparation	
Favorite toy or blanket			Relaxation	
Blowing bubbles			Deep breathing	
Stories			Rehearsal	
Praise				
Blowing Pinwheel				
"I spy" and "finder" games/books				
Imagery				
Having choices				
Imagining favorite or fun place				

### Relaxation

Deep Breathing (also called belly/tummy breathing, abdominal breathing, or diaphragmatic breathing). Using this kind of breathing not only helps with pain but also with worry, nausea, and problems falling asleep. It is usually best if you practice this technique with your child even when there isn't any pain. This way, he/she will be an 'expert' if their pain, worry, nausea, or sleep problems return.

1. Begin by having your child lie down or sit back in a comfortable chair.
2. Then have them breathe in as slowly and deeply as they can through their nose. As they breathe in, they should relax their stomach muscles so that the stomach rises up a bit (don't cheat by pushing it out – it will naturally go up on its own). Your child should try to not move their chest at all.
3. Once all the air is in, then count slowly to 3 (this should take about 3 seconds).
4. Then your child should breathe out as slowly and completely as they can through their mouth. Then count to 3 again.
5. They should try to breathe slowly so that they are breathing about every 10 to 15 seconds. Short breaths make pain and fear increase!
6. If your child has difficulties relaxing their stomach muscles, place a small stuffed animal on their belly button so they can watch it go up and down as they breathe. If their chest still moves a lot, place a second stuffed animal on their chest (just below the collarbone) that they can watch and try not to move.

**Progressive Muscle Relaxation** is a fancy way to say tensing and relaxing each muscle group starting at the toes and moving all the way to the top of the head. You can help your child do this by telling your child to:

1. Tightly curl their toes like they are trying to pick a sock up off the floor, count slowly to 5 then relax and gently wiggle their toes. Do this two 2 more times.
2. With legs straight out, they should point the toes as far down as they can, count to 5 then relax and gently move the ankle around. Do this two 2 more times.
3. With legs straight out, they should then point the toes up toward their head, count to 5 then relax and gently move the ankle around. Do this two 2 more times.
4. Then have them tighten up their thigh muscles, count to 5 then relax and gently move their legs around. Do this two 2 more times.
5. Then have them tighten up their bottom muscles, count to 5 then relax. Do this two 2 more times.
6. By now your child's legs should feel very relaxed and heavy.
7. Now it's time to tighten up their stomach muscles. Younger children might want to pretend that a baby elephant is going to step on their stomach, count to 5 then relax. Do this two 2 more times.
8. Then have them make very tight fists with their hands, count to 5 then relax and gently wiggle their fingers. Do this two 2 more times.
9. Then tighten up the forearms by having them roll their wrist forward as far as they can go, count to 5 then relax and gently wiggle their wrists. Do this two 2 more times.
10. Then have your child "show their muscles," count to 5 then relax and gently wiggle their arms. Do this two 2 more times.
11. Then have your child try to touch their elbows together in front of themselves, count to 5 then relax and gently wiggle their fingers. Do this two 2 more times.
12. Then see if they can touch their elbows together in the back, count to 5, then relax and gently wiggle their fingers. Do this two 2 more times.
13. Next, have them look straight ahead and lift their shoulders to their ears, count to 5 then relax and wiggle his/her fingers. Do this two 2 more times.
14. Then have them bite down hard, count to 5 then relax and gently wiggle their fingers. Do this two 2 more times.
15. Finally, have them squeeze their eyes shut tightly, count to 5 then relax and gently wiggle their fingers. Do this two 2 more times.

None of their exercises should hurt. But, if they do, then have your child do them less vigorously. Also, these exercises should never be done on the part of the body that is bothering them the most. For example, if your child's right arm is broken, they should not do these exercises with their right arm. With practice, your child will be able to notice when their muscles are tight and then be able to relax them any time.

### **Imagery**

Imagery is like daydreaming about a favorite place or activity. Your child can focus on mental pictures that are fun, pleasant, and happy. It doesn't matter if the images are real or not. Sometimes imaginary things are a lot of fun! Some examples might be: going to their room at home, playing with friends or a family pet, floating on a cloud, flying in outer space, going to the beach or amusement park, eating ice cream, or swimming like a fish in the ocean. Imagery is easy. Just have your child close their eyes gently and think of a fun or favorite place. Have them try to see as much detail as they can. Some children can even imagine touching things, sounds, smells, and tastes too! We want all five of their senses to be involved in the image. The more involved the image, the better. With practice, your child will be able to use these images when needed.

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