

Visualization

People often associate visualization with cancer patients. Certainly there have been cancer patients who recovered using visualization despite a terminal prognosis.

The best known story is that of Garret Porter a 10 year old boy who had an inoperable brain tumour. It was the time of the original Star Wars and he imagined his tumour as an enemy spaceship and every day he imagined going towards the spaceship firing lasers and attempting to destroy it. One day he couldn't find the spaceship and a scan done soon after showed the tumour had disappeared.

Around the same time the Simontons produced the book **Getting Well Again** about their pioneering work in patients with terminal cancer. After observing one patient who had cured himself of inoperable throat cancer by using visualization, they started to use this technique routinely and with considerable success. What these extraordinary cases make us realise is that the body had far greater powers of healing that we have given it credit for.

Evidence for Visualization

In spite of these interesting stories there was little scientific data to support visualization until recently. But in the last 10 years a large body of research has accumulated showing it has real effects on the body. David Hamilton's excellent book "**How the Mind can Heal the Body**" summarises this research. It covers research which demonstrates that our thoughts can change the chemicals and neurotransmitters in our bodies, can switch genes on and off, can activate certain parts of the brain and can probably activate stem cells. It is well known that placebos can have a profound effect in many diseases but few people have asked the reason why. As these remedies usually just contain sugar and sand, the healing that occurs must originate from the mind. This means that at some point the placebo must activate a belief that healing will occur and the body has the power and ability to make this happen. But how can we tap into this? It appears that visualisation, like placebos, seems to access this subconscious power. There have also been studies contrasting successful and unsuccessful visualizers. The former typically use large, bright, compelling images, as if they were there whereas the latter use distant, fuzzy images as if they are not there.

The rest of the book then goes on to demonstrate how visualization can be used to help in many illnesses. It includes many uplifting stories of patients a variety of serious conditions. The biggest section is understandably on cancer. However it also includes a case of a man who cured himself of the rare neurological disease, myasthenia gravis. His neurologist told him he had never seen this disease recover before. The

book is easy to use as it has an appendix with many common medical conditions and sample visualizations which can be used straight away.

Types of Visualization

The effects of visualisation can be very specific. For instance visualizing lifting light weights has a different effect on the body than visualizing lifting heavy weights. Visualizing moving a specific part of the body has an effect on that part of the brain responsible for that part and only that part. The more this is done the more that part of the brain changes.

Many types of visualization have been used by patients with success. In a sense it is **only limited by our creativity and imagination**. However some of the visualizations happened spontaneously as with a man who had an infection of the valves of his heart and suddenly saw himself inside the heart using a pressure hose to remove the bacteria and a lady with cancer who found herself watching cancer cells getting on a bus and waving goodbye to them. However most people have created their own visualizations.

Visualizations used include seeing the illness disappearing (tumours melting like ice, cancer cells appearing as balloons and being popped, fish eating a tumour, tiny workmen repairing a torn muscle), seeing the immune system getting stronger with more and more immune cells (perhaps like little soldiers appearing in huge numbers or turning up a dial to increase the flow of immune cells) or changing a genetic mutation by typing in a new computer program and pressing "enter".

Other strategies have been seeing the body in perfect health (some have used running on beaches, climbing mountains) or seeing disease being washed out of the body or seeing parts of body cleansed and healthy. Another strategy is to seeing yourself at some time in the future in perfect health (sometimes doing something symbolic such as being at children's wedding or graduation) or seeing yourself happily doing all the things you always wanted to do at some future date.

Anything that enhances the visualization will be beneficial. Some found using rousing music was very helpful and anything that creates strong positive emotions can enhance visualization. Adding humour (eg cartoon characters) to the visualizations lightens the mood and usually helps. In contrast the author suggests stopping if doing the visualization creates stress. Asking the mind to come up with a suitable visualization has helped some people. He suggests after each visualization saying "Thank you" and "This is done". Typically the visualization have to be repeated many times. In the original case observed by the Simontons it took two months of daily visualizations for the tumour to disappear. David Hamilton recommends 10 minutes of visualization three times daily. Each time the effect should get stronger as it is known that when you start any new activity the part of the brain responsible for this increases in size.

David Hamilton suggests that visualization may be one of the most powerful healing interventions we can do. It also costs nothing apart from a little time and has no adverse effects.