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Pre-Surgery Imagery

Welcome to this Healthy Living To Go podcast from Kaiser Permanente, designed to fit the way you live and the way you learn. Listen, live well, and thrive.

Hello. I'm Belleruth Naparstek and this is a guided imagery program that I've designed for people undergoing surgery. I've included both an imagery and an affirmations program, but the imagery is a little more geared to preparing you for your surgery beforehand, and the affirmations are more focused on helping you heal afterwards.

See if your doctor will let you play this on your headset during surgery. Physicians are generally glad to comply if doing so adds to your sense of comfort and safety.

We now have strong evidence from UC Davis Medical Center, The Cleveland Clinic and several other places to show that this imagery can reduce your discomfort and increase the speed of your recovery, sometimes by quite a lot. And keep in mind, these findings were in people who started listening only 2 to 3 days before their surgery, and typically just for 4 times. We even have several instances of people only being able to listen once, just before their surgery, who had excellent results. Clearly, when you take a more active part in your medical treatment, you tend to feel better and do better.

This imagery weaves several mind-body healing principles into the story it tells. It begins by helping you to relax and clear the mind. Then it calls upon your senses and memory to engage your imagination. And finally, it encourages you to experience a story that contains many healing images.

Some of these images are biological and physical. Others are psychological and emotional. And some you could even call spiritual.

If you do have the opportunity to listen to this program several times, you'll probably find that it has a stronger and stronger effect over time. You might hear something for the first time after several times of listening. Trust your mind to notice what it needs to hear, when it needs to hear it, and that can change each time.

Don't feel you have to follow this program exactly as is. You may want to stop and linger over some especially meaningful images and ignore the rest... or you may find yourself rearranging a word or phrase that just doesn't suit you. Feel free to let your mind edit as it sees fit. It probably will anyway.

People sometimes worry that they're not listening attentively enough, or that they're not experiencing the imagery correctly. The truth is, you'll probably go in and out of paying attention, because of the dreamy state you're likely to be in... some people even fall asleep the first few times they listen, because they're not used to being both relaxed and awake.... Don't worry. We've been finding that even if you're sleeping, you're still absorbing the images and ideas being played.

And because this method deliberately encourages this dreamy mind-state, please don't play it while driving...

Every now and then, the imagery will bring forth unexpected emotion. If this is the case with you, see if you can allow the feelings come up and move through you, seeing it as a necessary kind of rinsing that's taking place... it won't hurt you to do this, and it may in fact be very good for you.

Affirmations suit some people more than guided imagery.... Affirmations are positive statements that can be very useful in the healing process, a sort of reprogramming of your unconscious mind to combat negative thinking. These affirmations are particularly geared to help you after your surgery, but you're welcome to use them before surgery as well.

With either method, take what is useful and leave the rest. If there is an image or a statement that is especially meaningful to you, try to briefly play it over in your mind several times during the day – when you brush your teeth, or stop for a red light, or, even better, just as you enter that twilight zone just before falling asleep – an especially powerful time to do this...

Listen as often as you like... most people do well listening as little as twice a day, morning and evening.. You may not need to hear these instructions each time you do this... you may only want to return to them only now and then...

So see if you can take this next while to commit yourself to this process of engaging the power of your imagination to help you heal... by gently immersing yourself in this safe and easy process...

All you have to do is settle in, relax and let yourself listen...

To begin with, see if you can position yourself as comfortably as you can... Shifting your weight so you're allowing your body to be fully supported... with your head, neck and spine straight... and taking a couple of deep, full cleansing breaths... inhaling as fully as you comfortably can... sending the warm energy of your breath to any part of your body that's sore or tense or tight... and releasing the discomfort with the exhale... so that you can feel your breath going to all the tight, tense places... loosening and softening them...and then gathering up all the tension and breathing it out.

So that more and more, you can feel safe and comfortable, relaxed and easy... watching the cleansing action of the breath with friendly but detached awareness. And any unwelcome thoughts that come to mind those too can be sent out with the breath... released with the exhale, so that for just a moment the mind is empty, for just a split second it is free and clear space and you are blessed with stillness. And any emotions that are rocking around in there, those too are noted and acknowledged and sent out with the breath. So that your emotional self is still and quiet, like a lake with no ripples.

And now imagining a place, inside or outdoors, where you feel safe and peaceful and easy. A place either real or imaginary, a place that you used to go to... or go to now... or somewhere you've always wanted to be... it doesn't matter, just so that it's a place that feels good and safe and peaceful to you.

And allowing the place to become more real to you in all of it's dimensions...looking around you, taking the place in with your eyes, enjoying the colors, the scenery, looking over to your right and over to your leftand feeling whatever you're sitting against or lying upon whether it's sand or grass, a pine-needly forest floor ... a cozy armchair... or a nice warm rock in the sun.

And listening to the sounds of the place... birds or leaves ...water, wind or music... just so your ears can become tune to the wonderful sounds of this place... that is so safe and peaceful to you. You might feel a breeze blowing... crisp and dry, or balmy and wet...or the warmth of a cozy fire on your face and

hands... so just letting your skin enjoy the wonderful presence of this place... .And smelling it's rich fragrance... whether it's the scent of flowers... or salt sea air.. sweet meadow grass...

And as you look out in front of you... you notice there's a shimmering in the air... like heat off a hot surface... there's this shimmering... and as you watch, it becomes more and more tangible, like a translucent kind of screen... but with a certain depth and solidity to it.. and it's a few feet in front of you..

And as you watch the screen, with a kind of peaceful curiosity, you gradually become aware of forms beginning to appear on it... becoming more and more defined.. and you can see with a kind of detached interest that this is an operating room.. and that busy, capable staff people are preparing it for someone... a team of competent, trustworthy collaborators, readying the equipment, working together...

You softly and easily enter the screen, to have a closer look.. undetected, you just slip into the screen and check things out.. moving here and there in the room...

A patient is wheeled in and you look over... surprised but not surprised to see that it is you... looking comfortable and relaxed.. surrounded by capable people who care about doing their work well...

You can also see, hovering around you, a remarkable band of magical protectors, guardian angels... a smiling nodding cheering section of well-wishers... some looking familiar... seeing perhaps the faces of some of those who love you.. from the past, the present, the future... filling up the entire room... wishing you well... looking after you... proud of your courage... pleased you are taking this step to be as strong and well as you can be...

One of them looks steadily into your eyes and nods with quiet confidence as you move into deep sleep... or perhaps just a physical numbness takes over... safely and easily...

You watch as the team surrounding you works over you... and perhaps they even express surprise at how well things are going... at how easy it is to do what's needed... at how cooperative your body is being... even slowing down the blood flow to make the work go more smoothly...

So just feeling gratitude for this body of yours... this loyal familiar flesh that has been your steady companion all these years... as your magical band of allies continues to watch over you... smiling and nodding... keeping the space around you safe and kind and caring...

And hearing the pleased murmurs of the staff as they complete their work... as they put everything back together with sure, respectful hands... feeling good about what they have done... satisfied with themselves and each other...

And seeing yourself moved into a different room, still accompanied by your magical band of allies... so the body can begin its healing... the body's own innate intelligence knowing exactly what to do... delicately picking and choosing the correct nourishment to send to the site that is mending... and just feeling gratitude for this impeccable, built-in intelligence...

And seeing yourself rousing from sleep, drowsy but comfortable... settled and calm.. perhaps smiling at the nurse.. and drifting back to sleep... comfortable and safe... as your body continues its healing...

Healing with a minimum of discomfort... mending fully around the site... strong, new cells weaving themselves into place.. old debris washing away in the gentle river of the bloodstream... seeing tissue and bone and membrane and muscle solidly aligned... organized for maximum effectiveness... saluting your health and strength...

And you can easily see yourself... soon to be engaged in a favorite activity, moving with grace, vitality and ease... doing what you love to do, without a thought... just the body at full strength, enjoying its aliveness...

You smile, taking in the richness of knowing you have always been safe and protected... surrounded by love and caring... and the strength of knowing you have things to do, gifts to give, purposes to accomplish... that you require a strong, working body for this... and knowing that your body will cooperate in any way it can...

And so, feeling all through your body the penetrating warmth and power of this awareness... knowing it is yours to call forth whenever you wish... feeling peaceful and easy... breathing in and out, deeply and fully... you slip out of the magical translucent screen... back into your own peaceful, special place... again taking in the wonderful sights and sounds and smells ... although perhaps the colors around you are brighter... the sounds more vivid.. the air more alive...

You may feel that something powerful has happened.. that a major shift has occurred... and will continue to occur.. with or without your conscious working on it...

And you see very clearly that you can call forth this place, the magical screen, the band of allies.. whenever you wish to further the work you have already done...

And so, feeling yourself sitting in your chair or lying down, breathing in and out, very rhythmically and easily... gently and with soft eyes, coming back into the room whenever you are ready... knowing in a deep place that you have done important healing work.. that you are better for this...

And so you are...