



GENERAL ACUPUNCTURE

Moving With Imagery: Help More Patients

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"I was told to move both hands from side-to-side like windshield wipers," said Raquel J., "in rehab after surgery to repair a fractured left wrist." The advice was ideal. Not only was it easy to do with imagery, but utilized our Zen Shiatsu way of encouraging the active side to help the injured side. And a rhythmic movement is fun. Raquel found herself doing the "windshield wipe" as she walked along the streets near her New York City home. Think of the movement — it also circulates Qi around the elbows and entire arm up to the shoulders. When the physical therapist heard that Raquel also played the piano — she encouraged her to strum along the keys to increase mobility in her fingers.

Postmastectomy?

Similarly after my modified radical mastectomy years ago, I found the exercises supplied by the American Cancer Society so boring and uninspiring that I started to improvise. Voila! Instinctively I began to move my arms in circles and a whole sequence of exercises evolved spontaneously. Rolling circles. Horizontal circles. Vertical circles. Wrist circles. And finally circles involving the whole arm. All done to Mozart. The result? I achieved mobility and arm extension much faster than the norm — and no edema whatsoever. I teach these exercises in my Zen Shiatsu CE classes worldwide and to postmastectomy groups.



Sure, I wince when I see postmastectomy women with hefty arm edema struggling with luggage at airports and stations. It tells me they were never given the best advice regarding movement and Qi flow after their surgery. I always make a point of talking to them. I even taught one woman my "circle" exercises on a train journey from station-to-airport in London!

Integrating Imagery

Before working on a new client, I always ask them, "What are the three reasons you seek ABT? And, what are the three things that bring you joy in life?" This intrigues everyone and most say it's unusual for a therapist to ask what's right? And not just what's the problem? I then incorporate something from their joy list in the session and in exercise advice.

After my mother had a hip replaced, I helped her regain mobility and confidence by using tango steps — she used to be a wonderful tango dancer. I also encouraged her to use her walking stick like a hockey stick — she used to be a champion grass hockey center half! The transformation in her body language was instant. All we did was tap into familiar and beloved activities in order to motivate and enhance an unfamiliar challenge. Her swift recovery and mobility stunned her doctors and nurses.

I helped an octogenarian beat insomnia by encouraging him to walk up and down the hall in his apartment doing imaginary serves. He used to be an avid tennis player. The exercise relaxed him to a point of weariness each night and helped him sleep. It also reminded him of his youth!

When my middle brother experienced a lung embolism and was hospitalized on Prince Edward Island, I was teaching in Switzerland at the time, I had to drum up some imagery in daily long distance phone calls.

He was finding it difficult and painful to breathe — so, knowing he adored bagpipe music — I encouraged him to imagine his lungs as bagpipes he had to fill with air in order to create a sound.

He loved this idea. He would "play" his favorite bagpipe music in his mind to move his breath whenever he was awake. It was easy for him to track progress. He was able to forget the pain and match the length of his breath to bars of music. The exercise was even easier when he could play bagpipe music on his laptop!

Pre-and-Post-Surgery Imagery

If a client (or friend/family member) is facing surgery — or some complicated medical procedure — I always suggest (when possible) to choose a relevant exercise. Rowing or tennis or any upper body exercise is great pre-mastectomy, or before any form of breast or torso surgery.

Pre-hysterectomy? Doing hula-hoop type exercises with the hips — or simulated belly dancing — will enhance Qi flow in the lower body, and engage the mind. Post hysterectomy imagery can focus on clockwise circles of Qi moving around the race track of the abdomen to help fill the "Qi Void" caused by the removal of the organs. One of my colleagues who has just experienced a hysterectomy, loves to walk around the neighborhood as part of her healing process and to help repair "sinking Qi."

It can be helpful for clients to download anatomical pictures of the organ or body part prior to removal or surgery to be able to focus on filling the space visually with fresh Qi. And to include relevant Five Element imagery.

I encouraged one client Jacques R. after gall bladder surgery to imagine himself running in the woods after rain, absorbing the fragrance of cut grass, or cedar or pine, depending on locale. After bladder surgery, Stella G. found it energizing and beautiful to imagine herself jogging through the rolling surf of her favorite beach. She loved figuring out cause/and symptom in front of a colorful Five Element chart while we discussed her health profile. Stella also wanted to know the description of each acupoint I selected to treat, so she could visualize that specific imagery activating her body. I told her she was doing half the work when she remarked on her great progress.

Another senior client, Johan felt humiliated after surgery as he had to wear adult diapers. Knowing he was athletic in his earlier years, I smiled and said, "Adult diapers? No Johan! Think of yourself as Adonis with a loin cloth!" Instant change! He stood tall and expanded his chest and moved his hips like an Olympic athlete.

In short, involving a client in his/her own healing process in imaginative and colorful ways is easy. I remember a transforming moment in my own recovery from cancer when I discovered cancer was prompted by a confused cell. Immediately — I blocked fashionable terms like "war on cancer" or "bringing out the big guns." I also stopped simulating karate kicks to rid my body of cancer cells. I would never kick a confused person, so how could I kick a confused cell? The resolution? Simple. I just imagined those cells being coaxed out of confusion, with pure light!

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