Holistic Nurses

PAIN RELIEF TOOLS FOR PATIENTS & SELF-CARE
“First, treat the person. Second, treat the pain.”

Holistic nursing has healing the whole person as its goal. We...

- Care deeply for people and advocate for their rights and choices.¹
- Interact with the whole person, not just the illness, trauma, or tasks to be accomplished.¹
- Develop our healing presence so we can see, hear, and empathize clearly.¹
- Use skilled communication to determine the person’s needs.²,³
- Provide care that promotes comfort and healing, knowing the results are not always predictable.⁴
- Encourage the person to participate in their pain management as much as possible.⁵,⁶
- Use a multi-faceted approach that includes deep breathing, hydration and movement.⁵,⁶
- Embrace self-awareness and recognize our own humanity in the experience of our clients.¹

Relaxation

Deep Breathing: Instructions: 1) Slowly inhale, imagining you are softening and opening to receive safety, love or peace. 2) Slowly exhale, imagining you are releasing your pain, stress or fear. 3) Practice for short periods. For best results, combine with another intervention.¹,⁷,¹⁰

Note: Some people have experienced prior physical or psychological trauma which may be a significant contributor to their present experience of pain. In these cases, the person may be reluctant to relax because doing so may increase their flashbacks, panic or other PTSD-like symptoms. Instructions: 1) If a person is experiencing these symptoms, use your calm, healing presence to help them become mentally and physically grounded in their present situation. 2) Offer PMR (below) instead of Deep Breathing, and refer the person to a specialist who can better serve them.¹,¹⁰

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR): PMR involves focusing awareness on the body and alternately tightening and relaxing the muscle groups without holding the breath. Instructions: 1) Begin with the feet and calves: contract those muscles for 5 – 10 seconds or until mild fatigue is felt. 2) Release the tension. 3) Continue upwards through the body to include all muscle groups. 4) Finish with the facial muscles.¹

Meditation & Imagery

Meditation: Meditation can be done while sitting, lying or walking, and there are many ways to meditate. Here is one way.

Instructions: 1) With each inhalation, focus on one personally meaningful word, such as Faith, Hope, Love or Healing. 2) With each exhalation, focus on that same word softening your awareness and opening it to feel more peace. When your mind strays from your one word, gently bring it back. 3) Practice 10–30 minutes one or more times.¹,¹¹

Imagery: Imagery is the use of relaxation and mental visualization to improve well-being.

Instructions: 1) Choose one of the Relaxation tools and practice it for 1 - 2 minutes. 2) Scan your body and imagine gathering your pain into a ball. 3) Imagine changing the ball's size: first make it larger, then make it smaller. Repeat this several times so you feel confident in your ability. 4) Let's see how small you can make the ball. Is it possible to make it the size of a grain of sand? 5) Using your exhalations, allow the ball to move out of your body. Move it farther away with each exhalation. 6) Rest.¹³,¹⁶

Distraction

Distraction has been shown to significantly reduce mild pain; be cost-effective; have little or no negative effects and be more effective when used with other approaches. Instructions: Invite your patients to walk around the unit, look out the windows, connect with other patients, etc.¹,³⁶,⁵⁸

All of the above nursing interventions are evidence-based.
For References go to www.AHNA.org/holistic-pain-tools
Heat

Heat is a safe and effective treatment for:
- Aching pains, such as from fibromyalgia, over-exertion of muscles, and other chronic pain conditions
- Cramping or spasm pains, such as menstrual pain and low-back pain

Heat causes the blood vessels to dilate, bringing more circulation to the area. Instructions: 1) Heat can be applied in the form of a grain-filled bag, a heat pad, deep-heat cream, hot water bottle or heat lamp. The item should be warm, not hot. If excessive heat is applied, there is a risk of burns, so place a cloth between the heat source and the skin for protection. 2) The skin must be checked at regular intervals. Heat can be re-applied after an hour if needed. Heat has a greater effect when it is combined with gentle exercise or ROM. 27-30

Cold

Cold is used in the first 48 hours after soft tissue injury if there is swelling and later rehabilitation. Instructions: 1) If the skin is broken, protect the area with a plastic bag to protect it then place the ice pack over the plastic bag. Ice can cause frostbite if the skin is not protected or it is left on too long. 2) Check the skin color after 5 minutes. 3) If the skin is bright pink or red, STOP. 4) If it is not bright pink or red, replace the ice for 5-15 minutes. Leaving ice on for too long can slow the healing process. 5) Re-apply after an hour if needed 27-30

PRECAUTIONS: Do not use heat or cold...
- With diabetes or infection
- On areas with poor sensation
- On areas with poor circulation
- Around the front or side of the neck
- On the left shoulder with a heart condition
- When the client cannot follow your directions

Music

Music stimulates relaxation, distraction and mood alteration which all can help reduce many types of pain. Active participation in music enjoyment, such as occurs in music therapy, is even more effective than passive listening. Instructions: 1) Encourage the person to listen to a wide variety of music they enjoy. 2) Invite the person into active participation by using Deep Breathing, Imagery, Range of Motion and/or Expressive Movement with their listening and/or by sharing what they are experiencing. 1,15-26

Laughter

Laughter has been proven to relax muscles, produce endorphins, boost immunity, lower stress hormones and decrease pain. Laughing with others produces more powerful effects than laughing alone. 39, 42