

No Need for a Hammer A Guided Imagery Process for Patients Suffering from COVID-19

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This article includes rationale for and a practical script to use with patients suffering from COVID-19. The script begins on page two, and references are at the end. The article and script are free for use and to be publicly shared with author citation.

Research is emerging that the major way COVID-19 kills is by triggering a cytokine storm (cytokine release syndrome, CRS. cf. Chen, et al., 2020; Deng, You, & Pei, 2020; Ruan, et al., 2020; Tetro, 2020; Xu, et al., 2020), a form of systemic inflammatory response by the immune system that, in this case, damages the lungs and can cause death. The term "cytokine" is derived from a combination of two Greek words: "cyto" meaning cell and "kinos" meaning movement. Cytokines are cell-signaling molecules that aid cell-to-cell communication in immune responses and stimulate the movement of white blood cells (leukocytes) toward sites of inflammation, infection, and trauma. This is a healthy immune response in most circumstances. A cytokine storm is an overreaction by the immune system that can be damaging. In using this process, it may be helpful to explain this biological process to the patient.

Psychoneuroimmunology is the interaction between psychological processes and the nervous and immune systems of the human body (cf. Straug & Cutolo, 2018; Demas & Carlton, 2015; Wang & Ma, 2008; Solomon, 1987; Grade & Zegans, 1986). Particular emphasis is given to circuits involving immune cell products, particularly the hypothalamus–pituitary–adrenal axis and the sympathetic nervous system. (Besedovsky & del Rey 2007; Dantzer 2004).

Most hypnotic phenomena stem from a decoupling of the brain's control and monitoring processes (Landry & Raz, 2015). The decoupling of executive functions is highly malleable in the presence of strategic attentional instructions (Egner, et al., 2005). Since hypnotic processes actually engage different parts of the brain and exercise a top down neurological effect on the body, we want to give suggestions which will be genuinely helpful.

We know that stress diminishes immune response. One response to COVID-19 might be to attempt to strengthen the immune response, but if the problem really is a cytokine storm (in a simplified sense, too much immune response), then it may be helpful to prompt the body to respond in a more appropriate, balanced way.

There is also a substantial literature that hypnotic pain relief is very effective (cf. Mau, 2018), so this process aims for creating relief. As well the process attempts to strengthen breathing, which is reported as feeling difficult for patients.

To be clear, everyone needs to wash hands properly, practice social distancing, and take basic safety precautions to avoid contracting COVID-19. This approach is *not* a claim for curing COVID-19 using biopsychosocial processes, and the author does not advocate for using any mental health process as a substitute for seeking the best medical treatment available. Clients should always be encouraged to seek medical treatment and follow their physician's advice. However, this process of relaxation and healing imagery can certainly do no harm to those who are suffering. Given what we know about the mind's impact on medical prognosis, this process may well support and complement approved medical treatments (cf. Ray, 2004; please read this article and see the link in the references).

This guided imagery process is intended to be used by mental health and medical practitioners, as well as by lay hypnotists and others who use guided imagery with clients or patients. At this time (April 2, 2020), I would encourage you to include this as you deem appropriate in any client session you are doing, no matter what the overall goal of the session is (e.g., if you are doing hypnosis for smoking cessation or stress relief, etc., you could also include this process). Always inform the client and receive consent prior to performing any hypnosis process. This can be used as a standalone process, or it can be integrated with another process after the induction or just prior to emerging the client. This is a neo-Ericksonian approach, but there are other approaches that can achieve the same results. The practitioner assumes all responsibility for how this process is used with their own clients. Practitioners should always practice ethically and appropriately in areas of competence and in accordance with any license they hold.

Script: No Need for a Hammer

As you are just relaxing, noticing how comfortable your body feels and wondering just how good you can feel now – I wonder how that would feel if you felt as relaxed as you can feel now –

Because you become stronger as you become centered, relaxed. Your immune system strengthens as you feel that sense of calm now, as you allow yourself to become aware of being comfortably, safely, totally unaware, and enjoy the comfort of being completely, effortlessly numb.

It's okay if you don't know how to create this comfort this relief now – you can feel okay now just knowing your body knows exactly how to create this peace now. And your body does this all the time as you sleep, numb, relaxed, and your breath just flows, unknown – it just comfortably happens, by itself, without even noticing, every night of your life as you sleep, comfortable now. Your breathing is stronger now, by itself now, just happening, so you can remember to forget about it even as you notice how much better you feel now.

And you know you can relax more deeply if you think of a beautiful place. Let yourself experience that beautiful, perfect day. Where the temperature is fine and

comfortable, and you can feel the breeze, cool flowing. The air flows so easily now. The wind, that is so strong, powerful.

At peace doing nothing – I wonder if you could do that. You could be thinking of trying, yet there is a deeper part of you that is already creating healing. And while that part of you flows and heals, you can begin to just imagine peace now. And that beautiful place.

And we've all seen pictures of those stacks of smooth round stones, representing serenity. The sense of balance, peace. And the flow of the air, the gentle rustle of the breeze flowing like breath perhaps unnoticed in the leaves of the trees, powerful, sunlight dappling through as your breath just flows, easily, comfortably, effortlessly. Strong. And feel that sense of balance. Everything clear.

Even if there are storm clouds brewing and the breeze is even stronger now you know that even as you do things to take care of yourself there is also a part of you doing even more than you know, you know. And we both know that it is okay if you don't know what you know, because there is a part of you that naturally knows and always takes care of you, you know.

Feel the health of your body, remember the health of your lungs. A full soothing rhythmic flow; clean oxygen to your body. Over 21 thousand times a day you breathe in deeply and breathe out completely. It is easy to remember to forget about that because you feel so much more comfort now. Imagine the tissues of your lungs healthy; their natural healthy color and texture. Your breathing, your body, is strong and comfortable. Imagine your body creating this health now as you feel the rhythm of your heartbeat, slow, strong, deep, calm, healthy, 86 thousand times a day. Trusting your body to take care of you now.

After all, this is what your body does best, heal itself 50 million cells a second, changing and rearranging in the right sequence and the right order for you. Your body naturally heals – it is part of who you are, simply what you do. Without you even knowing it your body is constantly healing, taking care of you.

It is wonderful to realize that while you are doing things to take care of yourself there is also a part of you that is fighting for you, protecting you without you even knowing it. Caring for you, comforting you. And there is that ebb and flow easily now, the flow of oxygen to your body, while there is a part of you healing, guarding – your body naturally healing. It is wonderful to know that while you are consciously taking care of yourself there is a part of you that is doing even more to heal you, and while you imagine how your body is naturally healing now at the same time you are consciously being careful.

Soothing, healing, strong, comfortable, powerful.

The white blood cells, the guardians of the body, protect you from outside invaders – viruses, harmful bacteria – and mutant cells. Amazing how strong your body's natural healing and defense is!

The white blood cells move toward the invader, release substances – cytokines – to move forward and fight the invader. Cyto – cell; kinos – movement. Your immune system moves toward the invader! Defending you, defending your body!

Have you ever been really annoyed by a fly? Buzzing around. They just seem dirty. Something you want to get rid of. Now. You are ready to kill it, now! Buzzing around the room, spreading germs. You grab a flyswatter – it's all about the right tool for the job. Balance. A proportionate response. Because you could grab a hammer – the fly will be dead if you hit it with a hammer, but think of the damage. It may even be worse than the fly. Shattering a window, breaking a piece of furniture. No way you would do that!

Your body can overreact. That's what an allergic response is – the immune system – the white blood cells are acting to protect you, to take care of you. The allergen seems like a problem, and your body wants to hit it hard, even though the substance is not really a problem.

Or like an autoimmune problem, where your own immune system becomes confused and actually attacks the joints, tissues or organs of the body itself.

Or an overreaction to an invader, that cytokine storm. Like a hammer to a fly.

Imagine your immune system resetting. Imagine the white blood cells relearning, recalibrating, to leave the tissues of the body in peace, leaving the joints, the tissues, the organs of the body in peace. Balanced. Imagine – feel – your immune system resetting to realize that that old allergen is not actually a problem, that that overreaction is not actually necessary, and the body can be in peace. Imagine any inflammation fading away as that soothing cool breeze blows through your body, extinguishing any inflammation as the immune system leaves your body tissues in peace, protecting you from outside invaders and mutant cells.

Because there is a balance, and fear can topple those stones, creating chaos. A storm. A cytokine storm! Using a hammer to kill a fly, smashing the stones; a raging wind, destroying the balance. An overreaction that can damage the lungs. Too much of a good thing. You are far greater than you know you are, more than you have allowed yourself to believe. Your powerful body is constantly healing itself! There is no need for a hammer (and you could always use one if needed). You don't need it. The right response. Swat the fly. Trust your body. The right reaction. All the virus deserves is a flyswatter. Feel the healing, your immune system responding with perfect balance, complete success. Feel the healing, the peace, the strength, the comfort as you breathe so easily now.

Balance. Balance. Peace. Breaths flow without you knowing. Imagine your body at peace. Breathe it. Feel it. Balanced stones beautiful as that soothing wind blows. Imagine your immune system responding appropriately, at just the right level for you. Imagine your lungs healthy, as your breath just flows without you knowing. So strong now. So comfortable now. There's no need for a hammer.

Imagine your body using a flyswatter – just the right tool, just the right level of response. Healing now.

Feel the healing, the flow, the deep comfort. Feel the tissues of the lungs healthy. Your heart is strong.

And your breaths just flow unknown; imagine the tissues of the lungs at their natural normal healthy color and texture.

Imagine your heartbeat deep and strong and rhythmic and steady. It just happens. Part of who you are.

And your breath just flows; trust your body, healing, 50 million cells a second.

And the breeze just blows, soothing; feeling your immune system responding in just the right way to protect you.

And the breeze just flows, strong! Feeling the soothing comfort.

And the breeze just flows, feeling the strength of your body.

And the breeze just flows, feeling the health of your body.

And the breeze just flows, knowing that there is a part of you which knows how to create this balance.

And the breeze just flows, stones stacked, balanced. Feel the breeze, the warm comfort of the sun, a beautiful perfect day.

And the breeze just flows.

And the breeze just flows.

And the breeze just flows.

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