

A Mind-Body Approach to Better Care: Guided Imagery Enhances Quality of Life for Patients Receiving Maintenance Hemodialysis

Nader Aghakhani¹ , Béatrice Marianne Ewalds-Kvist^{2,3} , Bestoon Nanakaly⁴ , Saeid Amini Rarani⁵ 

¹Food and Beverages Safety Research Center, Urmia University of Medical Sciences, Urmia, Iran

²Department of Psychology, Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden

³Division of Psychology, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

⁴Department of Nursing, Hawler Medical University, Erbil, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

⁵Student Research Committee, Nursing and Midwifery Care Research Center, School of Nursing and Midwifery, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences, Isfahan, Iran

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Corresponding author: Amini Rarani aminior20@gmail.com

Received: May 24, 2025 **Revision Requested:** May 27, 2025

Last Revision Received: September 10, 2025 **Accepted:** September 24, 2025 **Publication Date:** January 7, 2026

Cite this article as: Aghakhani N, Ewalds-Kvist BM, Nanakaly, Rarani SA. A mind-body approach to better care: guided imagery enhances quality of life for patients receiving maintenance hemodialysis. *Turk J Nephrol.* 2026;35(1):80-81.

Dear Editor,

Although hemodialysis is a crucial, life-sustaining treatment, it frequently imposes substantial physical, psychological, and emotional burdens on patients. The repetitive nature of the procedure, combined with challenges such as anxiety, depression, fatigue, pain, and social isolation, can have a detrimental effect on patients' quality of life and their capacity to engage fully in daily activities. Consequently, these challenges can result in feelings of helplessness and reliance, further diminishing mental well-being and motivation.¹

To address these challenges, guided imagery (GI) offers a promising intervention. It is a visualization technology designed to boost patients' confidence in their ability to improve health outcomes. By cultivating a positive mindset, GI can enhance adherence to treatment plans, dietary restrictions, and lifestyle changes, ultimately supporting health maintenance and maximizing treatment benefits. This method leverages the mind-body connection, allowing patients to create mental images that promote relaxation, reduce stress, and enhance emotional resilience. Training in GI often involves visualizing tranquil natural environments to promote relaxation and focus, envisioning healing energies, or focusing on personal aspirations.²

One significant advantage of GI is its ability to reduce anxiety and stress, alleviate fears related to complications, and ease concerns about the future. This intervention not only offers immediate relief but also fosters emotional stability, empowering patients to cope with the ongoing stress associated with hemodialysis. Research shows that patients who engage in sessions report decreased anxiety, improved mood, a greater sense of control over their health, and an overall improvement in their quality of life.³

In addition to the psychological benefits, studies suggest that GI can positively impact physiological factors such as lowering blood pressure, improving sleep quality, and reducing pain perception. By calming the nervous system and alleviating discomfort associated with vascular access or other dialysis-related challenges, GI contributes to overall health and daily functioning. These physiological effects are crucial for reducing physical suffering and enabling greater patient engagement in daily activities.⁴

Given these advantages, integrating GI into hemodialysis care is a practical approach to enhancing patient outcomes. This integration can take place during treatment sessions, in clinical settings, or even at home. For example, practicing imagery exercises while undergoing the



procedure can turn potentially stressful moments into opportunities for relaxation. Even in cognitively impaired patients, utilizing recordings or guided sessions can offer mental refreshment and enhance overall well-being.⁵

To successfully implement this approach, healthcare professionals must consider individual patient preferences, cultural backgrounds, and belief systems. Challenges such as the need for further refinement of standardized procedures, short follow-up periods, and training duration for mindfulness meditation may arise when implementing GI. Comprehensive training for staff will ensure proper guidance and maximize therapeutic benefits, while regular assessments can help tailor the intervention to maintain its relevance and effectiveness.

In conclusion, GI serves as a valuable tool for improving the quality of life for patients receiving maintenance hemodialysis. It addresses psychological distress, promotes relaxation, and alleviates physical discomfort. The safety, simplicity, and adaptability of GI make it a powerful complement to traditional treatments, offering patients a path toward greater resilience, hope, and overall well-being.

Data Availability Statement: The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Author Contributions: Concept – N.A.; Design – B.M.E.; Supervision – S.A.R.; Resources – B.N.; Literature Search – N.A.; Writing Manuscript – B.M.E.; Critical Review – S.A.R.

Declaration of Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Funding: The authors declared that this study has received no financial support.

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