



ATTENTIVE
HEALTH

“happy place” visualization

If you’ve ever seen the movie “Happy Gilmore”, you should be familiar with this exercise. Remember the calming exercise Happy does so he can sink the ball on the putting green? His mentor tells him to “Think of a place that’s really perfect. Your own happy place.” Your “Happy Place” refers to a state of mind, a tranquil place you can visualize that calms you down and helps you restore balance. It is a mental vacation spot.

Visualizations of this nature are common exercises for stress relief and regaining focus. It can also be used to help with insomnia and restlessness. Of course, visualization doesn’t make your problems go away, but by using this & other techniques, you may be able to gain the necessary perspective to deal with those situations more effectively.

Here are a few tips for creating a “Happy Place” of your own:

- First and foremost, it’s helpful if you can remove yourself from the stressful environment and engage in some relaxation techniques like meditation or deep breathing before you begin your visualization. Your mind will be more receptive if you’re calm and centered.
- Once you’ve moved yourself into a more relaxed state, bring to mind a scene that soothes and calms you. You can choose a natural setting like a beach or forest, or imagine a place that is representative of relaxation such as a spa or temple. Choose a serene place, such as a beach and water, a field with fresh flowers, a forest and stream, sand dunes, feeling the warmth of the sun – it should be somewhere that you can easily recognize and associate with.
- If you enjoy using your imagination, the sky’s the limit! Or, you may want to choose somewhere that you’ve been before, or “replay” a time when you felt serene, happy or particularly blessed.
- Imagine yourself being in this place, feeling balanced and calm.
- Rather than simply “seeing” the images in your mind, make an effort to mentally transport yourself to this calm setting and engage as many of your senses as you can. Imagine that you can smell the fresh air or incense in the temple; imagine that you can feel the rich earth beneath your feet, hear the roar of ocean waves or bird song, and feel the cool breeze moving through your hair. The more you can involve your senses, the more “real” the scene will seem to you, and the more effective it will be in calming you.
- Stay with the visualization for as long as you like, making an effort to fully relax your body and let go of worrisome thoughts.
- If you’re not used to visualizing or meditating, you may have trouble keeping your focus. Your thoughts may keep returning to the situations that made you feel stressed in the first place, or you may struggle to “see” these soothing images in your mind. This is completely normal. Just keep gently returning your focus to the visualization as often as necessary, and keep in mind that once you’ve made visualization a regular practice it will get easier to stay focused.