

Nondrug Pain and Symptom Management

RELAXATION

RELAXATION – a state or condition of being free from anxiety and muscle tension. Relieves pain by:

- Loosening tense muscles
- Distracting older adult from pain and other symptoms
- Decreasing stress
- Helping to cope
- Empowering to older adults as these techniques are some they can do independently

Relaxation techniques:

- Deep breathing
- Guided imagery programs
- Progressive muscle relaxation
- Listening to enjoyable music
- Thinking of peaceful images
- Repeating the same word or phrase over and over while allowing other thoughts to pass by, staying focused on the phrase or word
- Meditation

What you can do:

- Explore with the person what relaxation strategies have worked for them in the past or which ones they may want to try.
- Document your findings, sharing with the rest of the health care team
- Advocate for the person to have access to the items necessary for using these strategies. In most cases, it will be nothing but some quiet space. In some cases, a CD/MP3 player with headphones and a relaxation program can be used.
- Consider care-planning a trial of encouraging/assisting the person to use the strategies that work for them on a daily basis. Ask the person prior to beginning the strategy what their tension level is on a 0-10 scale and then again at the end of the use of the strategy. If it is effective, care plan it permanently, so that all caregivers can encourage the use of this nondrug technique.

Adapted and used with permission of Mary Ersek & HPNA (2009).

Reference: Swedish Medical Center. *Nursing Assistant End-of-Life: Computerized Educational Program*. Pittsburgh, PA: Hospice and Palliative Nursing Association; 2006.