

Palliative Care Team

A technique to distract yourself from unhelpful thoughts

Introduction

The technique described below can be useful when you notice that your thoughts are interfering with sleep, relaxation, daily life, or pleasurable activities.

How to do it

Focus on a pleasant, repetitive, or non-threatening thinking activity.

Examples of such thinking activities include:

- Putting things into categories - ideas people have used include putting animals, or fruit, or car names, or sports team players into alphabetical order.
- Teaching yourself the alphabet backwards.
- Remembering a song, particularly with a catchy chorus.
- Counting for example A1, B2, C3 ...
- Mentally putting parts of something together, such as a bicycle or a recipe.
- Visualising a garden (your own or one you have visited) and what plants are in it in what order.
- Going through each part of the body from the tips of the toes to the top of the head, spending a few moments concentrating on how each part feels – and relaxing the area if necessary.

Each time unhelpful thoughts come into your mind, start at the beginning of the thinking activity you have chosen.

When to do it

This technique can be useful when:

- Trying to get to sleep, but thoughts or physical discomfort keep intruding.
- In situations where unhelpful thoughts keep demanding attention.
- To calm the mind while undergoing treatments or investigations you find uncomfortable and/or difficult.

Each time you become aware of an unhelpful thought or feeling physically uncomfortable, concentrate on whatever thinking activity you have decided upon.

- Try not to flit from one thought blocking idea to another.
- Keep focused on the one you have chosen.

Initially, you might find that each time you try to engage in the thinking activity, the unhelpful thought or physical discomfort will try to dominate your thoughts. However, with practice many people find they can begin to control what they focus upon, such as the thinking activity they have selected.

Contacts/Further information

If you require further information please leave a message for:

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Document history

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