FAST FACTS: Distraction as Nondrug Pain Treatment

Distraction is the process of drawing a person’s attention away from one thought, object, or experience and toward a different thought, object, or experience. Distraction may decrease the experience of pain because of one’s ability to process only so much information at one time.

✓ Benefits of distraction
  o Decreasing pain
  o Increasing relaxation
  o Improving mood
  o Providing entertainment and an opportunity to spend time with others

✓ Potential problems with distraction
  o When distraction successfully relieves pain, some people may doubt the presence or severity of the pain
  o The individual may become more aware of pain when the distraction ends
  o The individual must be ready for and interested in using distraction as a pain relief technique

✓ Methods of distraction
  o Watching TV shows or movies
  o Petting an animal
  o Playing games (i.e. board, card, or video games)
  o Listening to music
  o Looking at pictures. Pictures may be used in the following way:
    ▪ Fill a folder or box with pictures from magazines or calendars
    ▪ Keep the folder or box on hand and bringing it out when your loved one need something to do
    ▪ Have your loved one look at a picture and describe it in any way they choose
    ▪ As soon as your loved one loses interest, choose another picture
  o Use of Humor. Humor may be used in the following way:
    ▪ Create a humor library by cutting out favorite cartoons, sayings, jokes, or quotes and putting them in an album or folder, bring it out when your loved one needs a distraction
    ▪ Watch or read sections of a funny movie or book
✓ What else can the Caregiver do?

- Write down and share information about your loved one’s pain with their healthcare provider
- Consider using a Pain Diary to note important information useful to the provider
- Suggest your loved one try a non-drug treatment and document the impact on their pain in their Pain Diary

Adapted from
2. The Nursing Home Pain Management Algorithm Clinical Trial, R01 NR009100, 7/1/05 – 4/30/10; Mary Ersek (PI) Used with permission of Mary Ersek and HPNA (2009).

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