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 an individual’s ability to process only so much information at one time.

✓ Benefits of Distraction
  o Decreasing pain
  o Increasing relaxation

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

✓ Methods of Distraction
  o Watching TV or movies
  o Petting an animal
  o Playing 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 you need something to do
    ▪ Look at a picture and describe it in any way you choose
    ▪ As soon as you lose interest, choose another picture
  o Use of Humor. Humor may be used in the following way:
    ▪ Create a humor library, cut out favorite cartoons, sayings, jokes, or quotes and put them in an album or folder, bring it out when you need a distraction
    ▪ Watch portions of a funny movie
    ▪ Read sections of a funny book out loud
✓ What else can you do

- Write down and share information about your pain with your healthcare provider
- Consider using a Pain Diary to note important information useful to the provider
- Try a non-drug treatment and document the impact on your pain in your Pain Diary

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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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