

Imaginal Exposure

Overcoming Fear and Avoidance related to IBD symptoms

Start with a relatively easy or mild instance of facing a situation you have been avoiding because of the fear or unpleasant feelings associated with it. Develop a least six steps which involve progressively more challenging exposures. The final step should be your goal or even a step beyond what you've designated as your goal.

Rate the degree to which you tend to avoid the situations listed below. Rate the strength of your fear for each situation using your Subjective Units of Distress (SUDS) score from 0 – 100%.

SUDS – Subjective Units of Distress Rating Scale

0	10	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100
Do not avoid the situation no anxiety		Hesitate to enter the situation but rarely avoid it – slightly/somewhat anxious			Sometimes avoid the situation – definitely anxious			Usually avoid the situation markedly or very anxious		Invariably avoid –severe / continuous anxiety, near panic

EXPOSURE HIERACHY

Step	DESCRIPTION	RATING	
		AVOIDANCE (0-100)	FEAR (SUDS) (0-100)
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			
6			
7			
8			
9			
10			

How to Practice Imagery Desensitization

1. **Relax for 5 to 10 minutes** or until you feel deeply relaxed, calm and comfortable.
2. **Visualize yourself in a peaceful scene**, a place that where you feel *safe*. This is a relaxing picture in your mind. It can be a scene outdoors (such as the beach) or indoors (curling up by the fireplace, in your bed) or can be completely from your imagination.
3. **Pick the first item on your anxiety hierarchy** (the one that causes you the least anxiety) **and imagine you are in that situation**. Try to make the scene come alive in your imagination. Imagine what you can hear, feel, see and smell if you were in this situation. Do not picture yourself as being anxious. Imagine yourself acting calm and confident, dealing with the situation in away you would most like to. If you feel little or no anxiety proceed to the next item up on your hierarchy.
4. If you experience mild or moderate anxiety, **spend 30 seconds to 1 in that scene**, allowing yourself to relax to it. Practice your breathing exercises to help breathe away any anxious sensations and use coping self talk such as “I am calm and at ease”, “I can cope with this”. Picture yourself handling the situation in a calm and confident manner.
5. After your minute of exposure, **retreat to peaceful scene and get fully relaxed**. Always relax deeply between scenes. If you have difficulty relaxing, use progressive muscle relaxation.
6. **Continue progressing up your hierarchy step by step in imagination**. Generally it will take to a minimum of 2 – 5 exposures to a scene to reduce your anxiety. Remember, it is important to feel fully comfortable with each step before proceeding onto a more advanced step on your hierarchy.
7. **Try to find time to practice imaginal exposure for 15 -20 minuets every day**.