

Mirror Therapy

Sometimes, after limb loss, patients still have feelings in the limb that was amputated (phantom pain). It can be painful and upsetting. You may feel pain, itching, heat, or cold in a limb that you cannot touch or move. Mirror therapy is a treatment used to “trick the brain” into thinking the limb is still there. It sends signals to areas in the brain that can cause feelings in the amputated limb. This has shown to decrease phantom pain.

How to Do Mirror Therapy

You need a tall mirror, the kind you might hang on the back of a closet door. You can buy one cheaply at many area stores.

Sit on the bed, couch, or floor, with your legs straight in front of you. Place the mirror between your legs, with the reflective side facing your good leg. When you look into the mirror, you should see your good leg reflected there. This “tricks” your brain into thinking it is your amputated leg.

Now move your leg, doing the exercises your therapist gave you. **Do not** look at your amputated leg behind the mirror. Just look into the mirror. The image you see will make it seem like your amputated leg is moving, without pain. This information is sent to your brain. Over time, it can decrease your pain. Some people feel relief right away. Others need a little time to feel the effects of this treatment.



Your Mirror Therapy Program

Your physical therapist will help you come up with a program that is right for you. They help you decide what exercises to do. They’ll tell you how long each mirror therapy session should last and how often you should do this treatment. A good goal is to work up to 15 minutes a day. This can be broken up into 5 minutes, 3 times a day, or all at once. You and your therapist can come up with a routine that works best for you.

To Find Out More

Check out this video on Treating 'phantom limb pain' with mirror therapy
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YL_60MPywnQ.

Your health care team may have given you this information as part of your care. If so, please use it and call if you have any questions. If this information was not given to you as part of your care, please check with your doctor. This is not medical advice. This is not to be used for diagnosis or treatment of any medical condition. Because each person’s health needs are different, you should talk with your doctor or others on your health care team when using this information. If you have an emergency, please call 911. Copyright © 6/2024. University of Wisconsin Hospitals and Clinics Authority. All rights reserved. Produced by the Department of Nursing. HF#7540.