

Introduction to Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This is a progressive muscle relaxation exercise, a technique designed to help your body to relax and for you to notice the difference between tension and relaxation in your muscles.

Tensing and then releasing tension from various muscle groups in the body has been shown to achieve a deep state of relaxation, decrease headaches and anxiety, along with improving concentration and sleep.

Firstly, you will be asked to tense a muscle hard but not so hard that you are straining or in pain, for about 10 seconds. You will then be asked to suddenly release the tension, ensuring that you do this in a careful and controlled manner. Before moving onto the next muscle group, you will have time to notice how the muscle now feels, in a state of relaxation compared to when it was tensed. You will have the opportunity to notice the spread of relaxation throughout your body, as you learn to let go of tension.

It is also important to be aware of any old injuries or current pain you may be experiencing, so that you do not re-injure or hurt yourself. Be sure to adapt the practice to suit your needs.

Try your best to allow all of your other muscles to remain relaxed, as much as possible while focusing on a specific muscle group. This becomes easier with practice.

During practice, you may notice that your mind wanders or noises distract you in your environment. This is perfectly normal. If this happens, simply notice that this has happened, and gently return your attention back to the muscle group you are working on in an accepting and kind manner.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation exercise

To begin, find yourself a quiet, comfortable space, free from distractions. You may choose to either sit or to lay down with your legs and arms uncrossed, ensuring that your spine is aligned and in a comfortable position. Sitting is preferred if you are feeling tired or a bit sleepy.

You may like to turn your phone off, loosen any tight clothing and take your shoes off. Ensure that you can be comfortable for the next 15 minutes or so. Give yourself permission to let go of your thoughts, your daily tasks and demands and to let go of any worries.

- Gently close your eyes or, if you prefer to keep them open, let them rest on a single point in front of you.
- Take a slow, deep breath in and out from the abdomen.
- Take another, a little deeper this time. You may feel your body start to relax and let go.
- We are going to work our way through the body from head to toe, tensing and then relaxing muscles groups as we go.
- Start by creating tension in your upper face by scrunching your eyes tight shut and frowning, holding the tension until I tell you to let go.
- And now letting go of the tension. Letting your face relax. Noticing the difference between tension and relaxation.
- This time create tension in your lower face by clenching your jaw tight and putting a big, fake smile on your face. Holding the tension.
- And letting go. Letting your face relax. Noticing the difference between tension and relaxation.
- Hold the tension in your shoulders and neck by pulling your shoulders up toward your ears and pulling your chin in toward the back of your neck. Shoulders up and chin in.
- Hold that tension.
- Now relax and feel the tension release. Let your shoulders drop and chin relax. Notice how much better it feels to let go.
- You may want to try the shoulders again. Hold your shoulders and neck up towards your ears, pulling your chin toward the back of your neck. Hold the tension.
- Now release and let go, letting the muscles grow soft and warm. Continue breathing easily.
- Next bend both of your elbows and tense your arms. Push your shoulders back and chest out. Hold the tension in your shoulders, arms and chest. You may notice your arms begin to quiver with tension.
- And let go of the tension. Let your arms, shoulder and chest relax. Let the relaxed feeling spread through your body. Feel your body becoming more and more relaxed.
- Slowly make a fist with both hands. Squeeze hard. Observe the tightness and tension in your hands and arms as you squeeze.

- Letting go of the tension, allowing your fingers and hand to uncurl and go loose. Notice the difference between the tense state and the relaxed state.
- Next tighten up your stomach muscles. Try and make your stomach as hard as you possibly can. Hold the tension.
- Now, relax your stomach muscles. Letting go of any tension. Take a slow deep breath to really let go of any remaining tension.
- Now tighten and flex the muscles in your lower back and buttocks. Hold the tension.
- And let go. Relax and notice the difference as you let your lower back, hips and buttocks relax. Let the relaxed feeling spread to the rest of the body. Feel completely and deeply relaxed.
- Hold the tension in your upper legs. Hold the tension and keep the muscles tight.
- And now let go. Notice the contrast between tension and relaxation. Just letting go. Relaxing.
- Now push your toes down, away from your body, and hold the tension in your lower legs. Notice what the tension feels like.
- And relax and let go. Feel the heaviness spread throughout your body as you relax further still.
- Lastly, hold the tension in your feet by arching your feet. Really push your arches up, toes down.
- And relax. Letting go of any remaining tension. Notice the feeling of relaxation spread through your body from head to toe.
- Now take a few quiet moments to soak up this feeling of your body relaxing, letting go more and more of tension.
- Visually scan your entire body for any remaining tension. Start with your feet, focus your attention on your toes, go up to your ankles and legs, all the way up to your buttocks.
- Scan the lower back all the way around to your abdomen and up to your shoulders. Go down the arms, to your wrist and tips of your fingers.
- Scan the throat, up to your jaw, scan the face all the way up to the top of your head.
- And now letting your attention rest with your breathing for a moment. Noticing the natural and effortless ebb and flow of breath in and out on your body.
- Feeling relaxed but gradually more alert.
- Shortly the exercise will be coming to an end. I encourage you to gently add a little movement into the body. You may want to begin with wriggling your toes and fingers. If you have had your eyes closed, you may want to gently blink the eyes back open and connect with the space you are in. You may also like to give your body a wake-up stretch.
- You are now feeling alert and relaxed.