



Progressive Muscle Relaxation: Step-by-Step Instructions

Relaxation “Training”

For people who want to overcome stress and anxiety, relaxation usually takes training or retraining. If it were that easy to “just relax,” wouldn’t you already be doing it?

One of my favorite relaxation techniques for effective anxiety relief is Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). Most people experiencing anxiety also feel muscle tension in their physical body. In fact, chronic muscle tension may be so automatic that it seems normal, and you may have forgotten what it feels like when your muscles are completely relaxed.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is an integrative Body-Mind technique that involves a 2-step process:

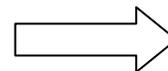
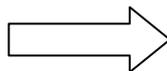
1. First you isolate and purposely tense up a particular group of muscles.
2. Next you quickly release the tension and put all of your attention on how your muscles feel when they are relaxed.

Regular practice of PMR (it only takes 10-15 minutes) helps decrease not only muscle tension, but also supports decreases in heart rate, respiration rate, blood pressure, and metabolic rate. These shifts greatly improve your overall feeling of well-being and reduce stress and anxiety.

Most of my clients feel an immediate sense of relaxation the first time they do PMR.

However, the real benefit comes from regular, daily practice of PMR (whether you feel tense at the time or not). Then it becomes second nature and supports deeper and deeper states of relaxation for both the body and the mind.

Try it for yourself right now!



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

1. Start by rating your current level of stress/anxiety on a scale of 0-10.
2. Make yourself comfortable (either sitting or lying down) and close your eyes.
3. Tighten one targeted muscle group at a time (see below). Tighten hard, but not to the point of cramping. Really isolate ONLY the muscle group you are targeting.
4. Hold the muscle group tight for 5 to 10 seconds. Focus on the tension.
5. Release the tension quickly, not gradually.
6. Stay focused on the release and relaxed feeling for about 20 seconds. Notice how relaxed your muscles feel.
7. Now rate your level of stress/anxiety again on a scale of 0-10.

Muscle Groups and How to Tense Them...

- **Hands:** Make a tight fist with each hand.
- **Wrists and forearms:** Extend them and bend the hands back at the wrist.
- **Biceps and upper arms:** Clench your fists. Flex your biceps as hard as you can.
- **Shoulders:** Pull your shoulders upward toward your ears, as tight as possible.
- **Forehead:** Wrinkle your forehead into a deep frown.
- **Eyes and bridge of nose:** Squeeze your eyes closed as tightly as possible.
- **Cheeks:** Grin big from ear to ear.
- **Jaws:** Open your mouth as wide as you can.
- **Around the mouth:** Press your lips together tightly.
- **Back of the neck:** Press your head back hard.
- **Front of the neck:** Touch your chin to your chest.
- **Chest:** Take a deep breath and stick your chest out, holding it for the 5-10 seconds.
- **Back:** Pull your shoulders back as tight as you can.
- **Stomach:** Suck it into a tight knot.
- **Hips and buttocks:** Press the buttocks together tightly.
- **Thighs:** Clench them hard.
- **Lower legs and feet:** Bend your feet upward from the ankle toward your face. Flex your feet upward as high as you can, and at the same time curl your toes down.