

Stress Management: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

What is progressive muscle relaxation?

Progressive muscle relaxation is a way to quiet your body and calm your mind. It can help you deal with stress, anxiety, and the pressures of everyday life.

Focusing on tightening and then relaxing your muscles makes it harder to think about stressful problems and events. Progressive muscle relaxation is also a way to relax muscles that are always tense from chronic stress.

When you do these exercises you focus on specific muscle groups, one at a time. You tense and relax each group while you breathe slowly and deeply. You can buy audio programs at many bookstores that teach this technique.

How do I do this exercise?

1. Sit in a chair with your back straight, head in line with your spine, both feet on the floor, and hands resting on your lap.
2. Tighten each muscle group and keep it tightened for 15 to 20 seconds. Then relax slowly and notice the difference between tension and relaxation. For example, you can tighten your neck muscles by pulling your chin in and shrugging your shoulders. Hold the tension for 15 to 20 seconds. Then relax slowly.

You can start at the head and work down the body or start at the feet and work up. The muscle groups to tighten and relax are:

- Forehead and scalp
- Eyes
- Face and Jaws
- Neck
- Upper arm
- Lower arm and hands
- Chest
- Stomach
- Back
- Buttocks and thighs
- Legs
- Feet

Exercise all muscle groups twice a day. Each exercise session should last 12 to 15 minutes.

Developed by RelayHealth.

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