



# progressive muscle relaxation

## MUSCLE TENSION

One of our bodies' reactions to stress, fear, and anxiety is muscle tension. This can lead to muscle aches and pain and leaves some people feeling exhausted. Do you "tense up" when you're feeling anxious? If so, muscle relaxation can be particularly helpful.

Muscle tension is part of a physiological process that prepares our bodies for potentially dangerous situations. In some cases, the situation may not actually be dangerous however our bodies respond in the same way.

## PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (PMR)

In progressive muscle relaxation exercises, you tense up particular muscles and then relax them. It helps to practice this technique consistently.

### *Preparing for relaxation*

When you are beginning to practice progressive muscle relaxation exercise, keep these things in mind:



1. **Physical injuries.** If you have any injuries, or a history of physical problems that may cause muscle pain, consult your doctor before you start.
2. **Select your surroundings.** Minimize distractions such as the TV, radio, and harsh lighting.
3. **Make yourself comfortable.** Sit in a comfortable chair or lie in a bed, wear loose clothing, and take off your shoes.
4. **Internal mechanics.** Avoid practicing after big, heavy meals, and do not practice after consuming intoxicants, such as alcohol.

### *General process*



1. Start by simply slowing down your breathing and giving yourself permission to relax.
2. When you tense your muscles, make sure you can feel the tension but do not tense so much that you feel pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
3. Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to think or say "relax" as you relax the muscle.
4. When you have finished the relaxation process, remain seating or lying down for a few moments, allowing yourself to gradually become alert.



# *progressive muscle relaxation*

## RELAXATION SEQUENCE

1. **Hand and forearm:** Make a fist with your hand.
2. **Upper arm:** Bring your forearm up to your shoulder to "make a muscle."
3. **Forehead:** Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised.
4. **Eyes and cheeks:** Squeeze your eyes tight shut.
5. **Mouth and jaw:** Open your mouth as wide as you can, as if you were yawning.
6. **Neck:** Be careful as you tense these muscles. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling.
7. **Shoulders:** Tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears.
8. **Shoulder blades / Back:** Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward.
9. **Chest and stomach:** Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
10. **Hips and buttocks:** Squeeze your buttock muscles.
11. **Right upper leg:** Tighten your right thigh.
12. **Right lower leg:** Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your right toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
13. **Right foot:** Curl your right toes downwards.
14. **Left upper leg:** Tighten your left thigh.
15. **Left lower leg:** Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your left toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
16. **Left foot:** Curl your left toes downwards.

***PRACTICE MEANS PROGRESS:** Only through practice can you become more aware of your muscles, how they respond with tension, and how you can relax them. Training your body to respond differently to stress is like training for anything else - practice is key!*

