

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Self-Guided Learning

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ActiLife™



A part of the ActiLife Physical Wellness Program

Progressive Muscle Relaxation for Stress Relief

When we experience stress our muscles tense up. Muscle “tension” is a natural response of the human body to protect us from apparent danger as our bodies prepare to fight or take flight. Ongoing stress and tension causes muscle aches and pains, especially in certain parts of the body like the neck and upper back. Parts of the body can be tense for so long that some people no longer even recognize or sense it.

Research shows that progressive muscle relaxation helps people deal with stress, including those experiencing physical pain and/or serious health issues (e.g. patients with cancer undergoing chemotherapy). Being more relaxed supports good mental, emotional, and physical health and wellbeing.

Reducing tension helps restore energy.

Reduce muscle tension to help relieve pain and soreness.



Let's get started!

Progressive muscle relaxation is very safe. However, here are some safety guidelines:

- If you have a serious medical issue such as heart disease or cancer, talk with your doctor first.
- Rarely, some people who do use this relaxation technique do not feel more relaxed and instead feel a sense of nervousness or anxiousness. If that happens to you, stop the exercise and talk with your doctor.
- If doing one of the listed exercises causes sharp pain or causes a muscle spasm or cramping, stop and don't do it. Consult with your doctor. However, continue with all the exercises that do not cause discomfort.
- Tightening muscles can cause your muscles to feel sore the next day. This is normal, and it typically goes away in a day or two. If not, talk with your doctor before participating again.
- When tightening your muscles, breathe. Do not hold your breath.

What's needed

You only need comfortable clothing and your favorite chair.

Now it's your turn!

- Read the instructions for the each exercise and body part listed.
- Squeeze the muscle(s) as hard as you comfortably can.
- Hold the muscle(s) tight for a slow count of 5 seconds. To help pace your counting you can say or think, "1 one thousand, 2 one thousand, 3 one thousand, 4 one thousand, 5 one thousand."
- Once you've counted to 5, abruptly relax the muscle(s).
- Focus on the area you just exercised to experience how it feels. Do this for 10 to 15 seconds.
- Repeat these steps for each exercise listed.

Warm Up

Sit tall in your chair with your feet flat on the floor. Take several slow, deep breaths, breathing with your stomach. Imagine your stomach is a balloon; it expands as you breathe in (goes out) and shrinks when you breathe out (goes in).

Exercises

Point Your Toes

- Straighten your right leg and lift your foot off the floor. Point your foot and toes down toward the floor as hard as you can. Feel the tension in your calf. Hold for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this. Repeat with your left leg.

Pull Toes Up

- Straighten your right leg and lift your foot off the floor. Pull your toes up toward your head as hard as you can. Feel the tension in your shin. Hold for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this. Repeat with your left leg.

Thigh

- Straighten your right leg, lift your foot off the floor and tighten your thigh as hard as you can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this. Repeat with your left leg.

Inner Thigh

- Squeeze your thighs and knees together as hard as you can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this.

Cheek to Cheek

- Squeeze your buttocks together as hard

as you can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this.

Abdomen

- Pull your stomach in as hard as you can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. When doing this exercise take extra care to not hold your breath.

Hug

- Cross your arms across your chest and hug yourself as hard as you can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this.

Hand and Fingers

- Straighten your right arm and spread your fingers apart as hard as you can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this. Repeat with your left hand.

Fist

- Bend your right elbow, tighten your biceps, make a fist and squeeze as hard as you can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this. Repeat with your left arm and hand.

Upper Back:

- Pull your shoulders back and squeeze your shoulder blades together as hard as you can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this.

Shoulder Shrug

- Bring your shoulders up toward your ears as hard as you can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this.

Surprise!

- Look as surprised as you possibly can, fully opening your eyes and mouth for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this.

Eyes Close

- Close your eyes as tightly as you can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this.

Smile!

- Make the biggest smile as you possibly can for a count of 5 and then quickly let go. Breathe as you do this.

Cool Down

Close your eyes and sense how you feel. Take several slow, deep breaths like you did for the warm up. Enjoy being more relaxed!

Keep up the good work!

You can do these exercises as often as you like and virtually anywhere you like; at the doctor's office, during a television commercial, or when lying in bed to help you fall asleep. Also, if you sense tension in a particular muscle or body part at any point in your day, you can do an exercise for just that area to help you relax.

The ActivLife Program

provides many opportunities to improve your health. Check with your ActivLife Coordinator to find out when classes and groups are offered or continue with more self-guided learning like:

- Strength!
- StretchAbility

Keep investing in your wellness!

My Progress in Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Name: _____

For the week of: _____

How Often?

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is safe to do as often as you like. It reduces stress and can generate many health benefits such as fewer aches and pains. Use your Progressive Muscle Relaxation Self-Guided Learning for instructions.

Record below the days during the week that you practice Progressive Muscle Relaxation. Mark each with an X.

MEDITATION	SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THUR	FRI	SAT	NOTES
Week One								
Week Two								
Week Three								
Week Four								