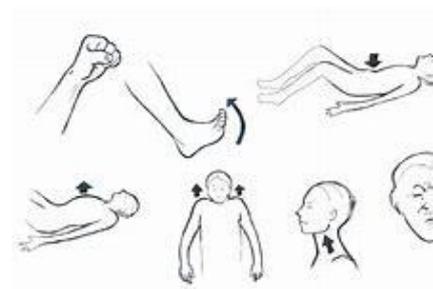


Progressive muscle relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is one of the most effective relaxation techniques. There is lots of research to support this technique. It teaches you to relax your mind and relieve stress by slowly and progressively tensing and then relaxing your muscles. It will take some practice but you'll quickly learn the difference between what a tense muscle feels like versus one that is completely relaxed. It begins by tensing each muscle group — but without straining them — and then suddenly releasing the tension. You will then feel the muscle relax.



Most people find that holding the tension in a muscle group is best at between 5 and 10 seconds. If you have any pain or discomfort at any of the targeted muscle groups feel free to omit that step. You might like to close your eyes; some people also find it helpful to visualize the muscles tensing as they're doing it. Keep breathing normally throughout the exercise, do not hold your breath in! You can start at your feet and work your way up to your head, or the other way around, from your head downward. If you begin to notice your mind wandering, gently bring it back to the muscle you are working on.

Instructions

- Find a comfortable position either sitting or lying down
- Take a deep breath through your abdomen, hold for a few seconds, and exhale slowly. As you breathe notice your stomach rising, and your lungs filling with air. Take your time and just spend a minute or two breathing and noticing your breathing.

As you go through each step, *remember to keep breathing normally*. Try not to hold your breath.

- Tighten the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as high as you can. Hold for about five seconds. And abruptly release feeling that tension fall away.
- Smile widely, feeling your mouth and cheeks tense. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release, appreciating the softness in your face.
- Tighten your eye muscles by squinting your eyelids tightly shut. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.
- Gently pull your head back as if to look at the ceiling. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release, feeling the tension melting away. *Pause for about 5 seconds, and just breath.*
- Tightly, but without straining, clench your right fist and hold this position for about 5 seconds... and release.

- Now, feel the tension in your right forearm and hand. Hold for about 5 seconds... and release.
- Now, tense your entire right arm. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release. *Pause for about 5 seconds, and just breath.*
- Now lift your shoulders up as if they could touch your ears. Hold for about 5 seconds, and quickly release.
- Repeat for your left arm. *Pause for about 5 seconds, and just breath.*
- Tense your upper back by pulling your shoulders back trying to make your shoulder blades touch. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.
- Tighten your chest by taking a deep breath in, hold for about 5 seconds, and exhale, blowing out all the tension.
- Now tighten the muscles in your stomach by sucking in. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.
- Gently arch your lower back. Hold for about 5 seconds... and relax.
- Tighten your buttocks. Hold for about 5 seconds... and release. *Pause for about 5 seconds, and just breath.*
- Feel the tension in your entire right leg and thigh. Hold for about 5 seconds... and relax.
- Now flex your right foot, pulling your toes towards you and feeling the tension in your calves. Hold for about 5 seconds... and relax, feel the weight of your legs sinking down.
- Repeat for your left leg and foot.
- Curl your toes under tensing your feet. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release. *Pause for about 5 seconds, and just breath.*

Now imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading through your body beginning at your head and going all the way down to your feet. Each wave feels warm and comforting. Your body is completely relaxed.