

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Introduction

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is an anxiety and stress reduction and relaxation technique first introduced by American physician Edmund Jacobson in the 1930s. The technique involves alternating tension and relaxation in all of the body's major muscle groups.

PMR is particularly beneficial if your muscles are often tense or if your default stress response include a tensing of the muscles. Practising PMR helps to develop greater awareness of how a relaxed muscle feels different from a tense muscle. This enables you to recognise stress or anxiousness early on, so that you can allow yourself to relax before the stress response or anxiety develops further.

Instructions

Find a quiet place free from distractions. Lie on the floor or recline in a chair, loosen any tight clothing, and remove glasses or contacts. Rest your hands in your lap or on the arms of the chair.

Turn your attention to your breath and start to breathe low and slow. Low and slow breathing means diaphragmatic breathing through your nose at a slow rate of around 6 breaths / min (or, if this is too slow, a rate slower than what you are used to but still enables you to breath effortlessly). [Download the Resonance Frequency Breathing guide](#) for more guidance on low and slow breathing.

Now, focus your attention on the following areas, allowing the rest of your body to remain relaxed.

1. **Forehead.** Squeeze the muscles in your forehead, holding for 15 seconds. Feel the muscles becoming tighter and tenser. Then, slowly release the tension in your forehead while counting for 30 seconds. Notice the difference in how your muscles feel and the sensation of relaxation. Continue to release the tension in your forehead until it feels completely relaxed. Continue breathing slowly and evenly.
2. **Jaw.** Tense the muscles in your jaw holding for 15 seconds. Then, release the tension slowly while counting for 30 seconds. Notice the feeling of relaxation and continue to breathe slowly and evenly.
3. **Neck and shoulders.** Increase tension in your neck and shoulders by raising your shoulders up toward your ears and hold for 15 seconds. Slowly release the tension as you count for 30 seconds. Notice the tension melting away.
4. **Arms and hands.** Slowly draw both hands into fists. Pull your fists into your chest and hold for 15 seconds, squeezing as tight as you can. Then, slowly release while you count for 30 seconds. Notice the feeling of relaxation.
5. **Buttocks.** Slowly increase tension in your buttocks over 15 seconds. Then, slowly release the tension over 30 seconds. Notice the tension melting away. Continue to breathe slowly and evenly.
6. **Legs.** Slowly, increase the tension in your quadriceps and calves over 15 seconds. Squeeze the muscles as hard as you can. Then, gently release the tension over 30 seconds. Notice the tension melting away and the feeling of relaxation that is left.
7. **Feet.** Slowly, increase the tension in your feet and toes. Tighten the muscles as much as you can. Then, slowly release the tension while you count for 30 seconds. Notice all the tension melting away. Continue breathing slowly and evenly.

Enjoy the feeling of relaxation sweeping through your body. Guided PMR audios can be useful:

<https://wellness.mcmaster.ca/topics/mindfulness-and-relaxation/>

<https://www.livingwell.org.au/relaxation-exercises/relaxation-strategy-5-progressive-muscle-relaxation/>