

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION



Stress is inevitable and takes on many forms such as motivation, anxiety, depression, feeling overwhelmed, or even hopeless. Often, a byproduct of stress surfaces in muscle tension. This constant, unacknowledged tension can cause fatigue, muscle rigidity, aches, and pains. Because we are often not aware of the muscle tension that we carry, progressive muscle relaxation is a wonderful way to bring awareness to our bodies.

What is it?

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is a practice that involves mindful breathing, paired with a scan throughout the body noticing, tensing, and relaxing muscles in order to gain awareness and rejuvenation.

How to do it?

Perform this practice in a place that you will likely not be disturbed. If possible, find a dimly lit, quiet room with a comfortable temperature. Sit or lie down in a position that is comfortable for your body and that will allow you to tighten and relax each muscle group. As you go through each muscle group in this practice tighten the muscle for five seconds and relax for 10 seconds, careful not to overly tense the muscle to the point of cramping. Please alter this exercise to fit your body's specific needs.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- **Take a moment to notice your breathing.** First, take a moment to notice your natural breathing pattern. Are your breaths shallow, deep, fast, or slow?
Now, breathe in through your nose for five seconds, filling your lungs until air reaches the very depths, and out through your mouth for five seconds, squeezing your lungs to empty all air. Slowly allow your eyes to close and repeat the breathing cycle ten times. Remember to continue slow, deep breaths throughout this practice.
- **Begin your Progressive Muscle Relaxation practice with a full body scan.** Take a moment to observe, but not alter, the state of the muscles in your forehead, jaw, neck, shoulders, arms, hands, back, legs, and feet. Which muscles feel tight, which muscles feel relaxed?
- **Hands and arms.** In both of your hands, create tight fists, curling your fingers in towards your palms. Make your fists squeeze and become increasingly tighter and tighter for five seconds, then release and allow your hands to relax to a natural position.
Now, contract your arm muscles in your forearms and biceps. Hold your arms in whichever position allows for this best to occur. Progressively tense and tighten your arm muscles for five seconds, then release and relax these muscles, allowing your arms to rest by your sides or in your lap.
- **Neck.** Carefully press your head against the floor or the back of a chair, allowing your neck muscles to tighten increasingly for five seconds, then release.
- **Shoulders.** Bring your shoulders up towards your ears, shrugging your shoulder muscles. This is a common place to carry excessive tension. Then relax your shoulders, allowing them to hang with no effort or resistance.
- **Facial Muscles.** Tighten your forehead, your mouth, eye muscles, and jaw by squeezing your eyes closed, raising your forehead and showing your teeth with your jaw closed. Clench your jaw, careful to not put too much stress on your teeth. Hold, and release.
- **Back.** Arch your back, creating distance from your torso and the floor or chair. Hold, and release
- **Abdomen.** Squeeze your stomach muscles as if you were embracing before getting punched. Pull in these muscles tight and hold, then relax.
- **Thighs and glutes.** Tighten the muscles surrounding your hips and upper thighs. Squeeze the thighs in towards each other and tighten the glutes. Hold, and release.
- **Calves and feet.** Point your feet and curl your toes as tight as you can, without causing cramping. Tighten your calf muscles as you do this. Hold for five seconds, and release.
- **Ending Body Scan.** Now, take a moment to observe the state of your body by noticing how your muscles feel in your face, neck, shoulder, hands, arms, back, abdomen, thighs, glutes, calves, and feet. Notice that your muscles are more relaxed than before. Softly open your eyes, take a small stretch if you need, and continue on with your day feeling aware, relaxed, and rejuvenated.