

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (Paired Muscle Relaxation)

(adapted from “The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook” by E. Bourne)

DISCLAIMER: Please check with your healthcare provider before attempting this exercise if you have any physical injuries. Be sure to be gentle and listen to your body!

Begin by finding a comfortable position sitting (standing or lying down). You can change positions any time during the progressive muscle relaxation exercise to make yourself more comfortable as needed. When you tense each muscle group, do so vigorously, without straining for seven to ten seconds.

1. **Hands and wrists:** Make fists with both of your hands, and pull your fists up toward your wrists; clench them. Pay attention to the tension. Notice the tension in your hands. Notice the tension...notice the tightness...just notice. Now LET GO. Just let go, let your hands drop down. Let all the tension flow out. Notice as your hands start to relax...notice the muscles letting go. Just notice ...paying attention to the sensations in your hands and wrists ...letting all the tension just flow away.
2. **Lower and upper arms:** Make fists with both of your hands and tense up your entire arm. Bend your arms up so that they touch your shoulders. Notice the tension... Notice the tightness. Now let go. Notice the way your arms feel now.
3. **Shoulders:** Bring your shoulders up to your ears. Tighten and squeeze them. See if you can reach your ears. Pay attention to how your shoulders feel. Hold it... A little more... Now release your shoulders back down. See if you notice anything different. Are they more relaxed than before?
4. **Tongue and mouth:** Close your mouth tightly without your teeth touching. Push your tongue on the roof of your mouth. Pay attention to the tension. Now release and notice the tension floating away.
5. **Neck:** (Do this very gently.) Keep your chin up and push your neck back. Now push your chin down to your chest. Do you feel any tension? Notice the tightness. Pay attention to the sensations in your neck. Now release... and bring your head back into a normal position.
6. **Chest:** Take deep breath and hold it for 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, Release. Slowly allow the breath to flow back out without force.

7. **Back:** Arch back, bringing shoulder blades together. Try and touch your shoulders together behind your back. Hold this position for a moment. Pay attention to how your back feels. Now let go and drop your hands back down to your sides. Feel the tightness and tension being released from your body.
8. **Stomach:** Tighten your stomach muscles by sucking your stomach in. Hold...and then release. Imagine a wave of relaxation spreading through your abdomen. Notice how your stomach expands again on its own.
9. **Upper legs and thighs:** Squeeze the muscles in your thighs all the way down to your knees. Hold ... and then relax. Feel your thigh muscles smoothing out and relaxing completely.
10. **Calves:** Tighten your calf muscles by pulling your toes toward you (flex carefully to avoid cramps). Hold... and then relax.
11. **Toes:** Tighten your feet by curling your toes downward. Hold... and then relax.
12. Mentally scan your body for any residual tension. If a particular area remains tense repeat one or two tense-relax cycles for that group of muscles.
13. Now imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading throughout your body, start at your head and gradually penetrating every muscle group all the way down your toes.
14. When you feel that you have released the tension in all of your muscles take a few deep breaths and turn to your side (if laying down). Get up slowly.