

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is based on 3 assumptions: a) it is possible to learn the difference between tension and relaxation; b) tension and relaxation are mutually exclusive; c) relaxation of the body through decreased muscle tension will in turn decrease mental tension.

In each step you'll first tense a muscle group, release it halfway, and then relax it completely. Pay close attention to how it feels to be relaxed as opposed to tense. For each muscle group, you can perform each exercise twice before progressing to the next muscle group. As you gain skill, you can omit the tension phase and focus just on relaxation.

1. Get in a comfortable position with limbs uncrossed. Take a deep breath, let it out slowly, as you exhale focus on the spreading relaxation.
2. Make a tight fist with each hand. Notice the uncomfortable tension in your hands and fingers. Hold that tension, then let go halfway and hold. Exhale and let your hands relax completely. Notice how the tension and discomfort drain from your hands replaced by comfort and relaxation. Focus on the contrast between the tension you felt and the relaxation you now feel. Concentrate on relaxing your hands completely.
3. Tense your upper arms tightly and focus on the tension. Let the tension out halfway and hold, focusing on the tension. Exhaling, relax your upper arms completely, focusing on the developing relaxation. Let your arms rest limply at your sides.
4. Curl your toes as tight as you can and hold. Relax the toes halfway...Exhaling, relax your toes completely and focus on the spreading relaxation.
5. Point your toes away from you and tense your feet and calves. Hold the tension hard...then let it out halfway...Exhaling, relax your feet and calves completely.
6. Extend your legs, and tense your thigh muscles. Hold the tension... let it out halfway and hold... Exhaling, relax your thighs completely. Concentrate on the sensation of relaxation in your feet, calves, and thighs...
7. Tense your stomach muscles as tight as you can, concentrating on the tension...Let the tension out halfway and hold...Exhaling, relax your stomach muscles completely. Focus on the spreading relaxation until your stomach muscles are completely relaxed.
8. Tighten your chest and shoulder muscles and hold... Let go halfway and hold...Exhaling, relax the muscles and concentrate on the deepening relaxation until your muscles are completely loose and relaxed...Your hands, arms, toes, feet, calves, thighs, stomach, chest, shoulders completely relaxed...
9. Tense your back muscles and hold...Let the tension out halfway, hold the reduced tension, and focus on it... Exhaling, relax your back muscles completely, focusing on the relaxation spreading over the entire area...
10. Keeping your torso, arms, and legs relaxed, tense your neck muscles. Hold...Release the tension halfway and hold...Exhaling, relax your neck completely. Allow your head to rest comfortably while you focus on the relaxation developing in your neck muscles.
11. Clench your teeth and feel the tension in the muscles of your jaw. Let the tension out halfway and hold...Exhaling, relax the jaw muscles...Let your mouth and facial muscles relax completely. Concentrate on totally relaxing these muscles...
12. Wrinkle your forehead and scalp as tightly as you can and hold...Release halfway and hold...Exhaling, relax your scalp and forehead completely, focusing on the feeling of relaxation and contrasting it with the earlier tension. Concentrate on relaxing all of the muscles of your body...Your hands, arms, toes, feet, calves, thighs, stomach, chest, shoulders, back, neck, jaw, forehead and scalp completely relaxed...

13. (Cue-controlled relaxation) Think of a word that means relaxation to you...it could be *calm*, *still*, *peace*, or simply *relax*...Take a deep breath in, filling the belly, ribs and chest...hold the breath in the back of your throat...then exhale slowly while thinking your relaxation cue word. Repeat this several times, inhaling and exhaling, thinking your relaxation cue word, each time striving to deepen your state of relaxation.