

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

The technique I am going to help you learn is called progressive muscle relaxation. It involves tensing and relaxing muscle groups throughout your body to bring about a state of relaxation. As I ask you to tense your muscles, only tighten them enough to feel some tension—maybe a third to a half of their fully tense state. Make sure you don't strain yourself or hold your breath when you tense your muscles. The goal is to notice what the muscles feel like when they are tense so you can more fully relax them. I'll have you hold the tension for about five seconds and then ask you to relax. Focus on the sensations of letting go of the tension and study the feelings of the muscle being completely relaxed. We'll have you do that for about a minute before moving on to the next muscle group.

Before we begin, get into a comfortable relaxation posture: feet on the floor, legs apart, neck straight, back against your chair, teeth slightly apart, eyes gently closed, and head upright. Take a few slow, deep, comfortable breaths. Breathe in deeply, hold for a moment, and exhale. As you breathe in, concentrate on the sound and feel of the air. As you exhale completely, notice the warmth of the air and silently say the word "calm" to yourself with each breath you let out. Take a few more slow deep breaths. Be sure to exhale slowly and completely each time. Imagine your body becoming more relaxed and feeling heavier in your chair each time you exhale. [Pause]

Now we'll begin the progressive muscle relaxation. First, we'll start with your **legs**. Lift your legs slightly off the ground, tense your thighs, and point your toes toward your head. Hold that position and feel the tension. Now let your legs drop to the ground and release all the tension at once. Notice the difference between the way your legs feel now when relaxed and how they felt when they were tense.

Now we will move to your **arms**. With your palms facing the ceiling, make a fist and raise your forearm bringing your fist as close to your shoulder as you can while at the same time pressing your arms to your sides. Feel the tension in your fingers, hands, and arms. And now relax. As you relax you may notice your arms feel warm and heavy. Notice the difference between the relaxation and tension in your arms. Continue to breathe slowly and deeply.

While your legs and arms remain relaxed, we will now move to your **shoulders and stomach**. Lift both shoulders as if you were trying to touch your ears with them and at the same time suck your stomach in as if someone were pushing on it. Feel the tightness and tension across both shoulders and in your stomach muscles and hold it. And now relax. Let your shoulders fall back down and enjoy the heaviness, warmth, and relaxation in your shoulders.

Continue to breathe slowly and deeply, and scan your legs, arms, and shoulders, releasing any excess tension you notice. Focus on the sensation of relaxation in these areas. We'll now move to your **face and neck**. To tense your neck, press your chin to your chest or the back of your head to the back of your chair. While doing this, squint your eyes and slightly bring your back teeth together, tensing just enough to feel the muscles in your jaw. Notice the tension in your face and neck: hold it. And now relax. Let all the tension go from your face and neck.

Continue to breathe slowly and enjoy the relaxed feelings throughout your entire body. Scan your body from your head to your toes and notice what your muscles feel like. As you are doing this, take five more slow deep breaths at your own pace. After you exhale on the last breath, open your eyes.

Guided Imagery Relaxation

Close your eyes and begin to relax. Breathe deeply and slowly and let your entire body feel relaxed and at ease. Now, imagine yourself at the back of a movie theatre. Picture a scene or a place that you associate with feeling relaxed and calm and imagine it on the screen at the front of the theatre. It can be a real place that you have been to or an imaginary place. Hold that scene in your mind. [Pause]

Now imagine yourself moving closer and closer to the screen and as you get closer, the picture becomes clearer and more vivid, almost as if you're in the image. Imagine that there are three steps right in front of the screen. Walk up the first, then the second, and now the third step. You are right in front of the screen and can see the image with perfect clarity. Now walk through the screen and put yourself in that image, not as if you were outside looking in, but actually in that place. [Pause]

Now look around you. Be aware of all the details of what you see. Notice the colors of everything around you, notice how vivid those colors are and areas of light and darkness. You might notice the various shades or textures and the intensity, softness, or brightness of the light. [Pause]

Be aware of the sounds you hear or don't hear in this place. Are the sounds close or far, loud or soft? [Pause]

Become aware of the smells. [Pause]

Notice the things that you can feel and the temperature of the air. [Pause]

Enjoy the sensation of being in this place where you can feel very, very relaxed. You can use any distracting, stressful, or anxious thoughts as reminders to easily travel back to this image and relax yourself. This can be your relaxation place and you can come here whenever you wish.

Relaxation Practice Record

Use this record to chart your relaxation practice over time. Before you begin your practice, use the scale below to rate your level of tension. After you complete the practice, use the same scale again to rate your level of tension. Note any differences. Remember, it may take a number of practice periods before you notice improvement.

| | | | | | | | | | | |
|--------------------|---|-----------------|---|---------------------|---|-------------------|---|---------------------|---|--------------------|
| 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 |
| Totally Relaxed | | Very Relaxed | | Slightly Relaxed | | Slightly Tense | | Moderately Tense | | Extremely Tense |

| Date | How long did you practice? (minutes) | Level of tension before practice (0-10) | Level of tension after practice (0-10) |
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