

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is a relaxation technique used to release stress. It can relax the muscles and lower blood pressure, heart rate, and respiration.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is tensing, and then relaxing, each muscle group of the body, one group at a time. Though this technique is simple it may take several sessions before it is 'mastered.'

(Audio muscle relaxation CDs or mp3s are available if you prefer to be guided through the progressive muscle relaxation. They usually last about 20 minutes.)

Progressive muscle relaxation may be done sitting or lying down.

The Practice

Tense up a group of muscles - tense meaningfully, but don't strain, hold for 5 to 10 seconds.

Release the tension from the muscles **all at once**.

Relax for 10 to 20 seconds.

You may find it helpful to count, for example:

Tense for a count of 5

Release all at once

Rest for a count of 10

or

Tense for a count of 10

Release all at once

Rest for a count of 20

Mindfully notice the *feeling of relaxation* when the contracted muscles are released.

When going through the muscle groups, there are no rules: you can start with the hands, or with the feet. You may do one side of the body (hand, arm, leg, foot) at a time or do both sides at the same time.

Go to the next page for an example of how you might progress.

Sample of Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise:

- ☞ Hands - Clench fists: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Right forearms and hands - Extend arm, elbow locked, and bend hand back at the wrist : **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Upper right arm - Bend arms at elbows and flex biceps: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Forehead - wrinkle forehead into frown, tense, release, rest, and/or raise eyebrows: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Eyes - close eyes tightly, hold and release: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Mouth - press lips tightly together: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Jaw - open mouth wide and stick out tongue : **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Buttocks: tense: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Abdomen: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Chest: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Back - arch back: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Neck and shoulders : **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Thighs: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Lower legs and feet - Point toes toward shin : **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**
- ☞ Feet - Point toes and curl them under: **tense for 5, release, rest for 10**

You may repeat relaxing and tensing muscle groups that have you've already done to relax them further.