

Progressive Relaxation: Basic Script

Progressive muscle relaxation is used to help lower blood pressure and heart rate, improve blood flow, and decrease anxiety. It may reduce the perception of pain.

How does it work?

Progressive relaxation can be practiced lying down or in a chair. Each muscle or muscle group is tensed from five to seven seconds and then relaxed for twenty to thirty seconds. This procedure is repeated at least once. If one of your muscles is hard to relax, you can practice tensing and releasing it up to five times. You may also find it helpful to say one of these phrases to yourself as you are doing progressive relaxation:

Let go of the tension

Calm and rested

Relax and smooth out the muscles

Let the tension dissolve away

Get into a comfortable position in a quiet room where you won't be disturbed. You may want to loosen your clothing and remove your shoes. Begin to relax as you take a few slow, deep breaths. Now as you let the rest of your body relax, clench your fists and bend them back at the wrists ... Tighter and tighter ... feel the tension in your fists and forearms ... Now relax Feel the looseness in your hands and forearms ... Notice the contrast with the tension. (If you have time repeat this and all the other procedures at least one more time.)

Now bend your elbows and tense your biceps.... Tense them as hard as you can and observe the feeling of tautness.... Let your hands drop down and relax.... Feel that difference.... Turn your attention to your head and wrinkle your forehead as tight as you can.... Feel the tension in your forehead and scalp. Now relax and smooth it out. Imagine your entire forehead and scalp becoming smooth and at rest.... Now frown and notice the strain spreading throughout your forehead.... Let go. Allow your brow to become smooth again.... Squeeze your eyes closed.... Tighter.... Relax your eyes. Let them remain closed gently and comfortably.... Now open your mouth wide and feel the tension in your jaw.... Relax your jaw.... When the jaw is relaxed, your lips will be slightly parted. Notice the contrast between tension and relaxation.... Now press your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Experience the ache in the back of your mouth.... Relax.... Press your lips now purse them into an "O".... Relax your lips.... Feel the relaxation in your forehead, scalp, eyes, jaw, tongue, and lips.... Let go more... and more....

Roll your head slowly around on your neck. Feeling the point of tension, shifting as your head moves.... and then slowly roll your head the other way. Relax, allowing your head to return to a comfortable upright position.... Now shrug your shoulders; bring your shoulders up toward your ears... hold it... Drop your shoulders back down and feel the relaxation spreading through your neck, throat, and shoulders.... Pure relaxation, deeper and deeper....

Now breathe in and fill your lungs completely. Hold your breath.... Experience the tension.... Now exhale and let your chest become loose... Continue relaxing, letting your breath come freely and gently.... Notice the tension draining out of your muscles with each exhalation....

Next, tighten your stomach and hold. Feel the tension.... Relax.... Now place your hand on your stomach. Breathe deeply into your stomach, pushing your hand up. Hold.... And relax. Feel the contrast of relaxation as the air rushes out.... Now arch your back, without straining. Keep the rest of your body as relaxed as possible. Focus on the tension in your lower back.... Now relax.... Let the tension dissolve away.

Tighten your buttocks and thighs.... Relax and feel the difference.... Now straighten and tense your legs and curl your toes downward. Experience the tension Relax.... Straighten and tense your legs and bend your toes toward your face.... Relax.

Feel the comfortable warmth and heaviness of deep relaxation throughout your entire body as you continue to breathe slowly and deeply.... You can relax even more as you move up through your body, letting go of the last bit of tension in your body. Relax your feet.... relax your ankles.... relax your calves.... relax your shins.... relax your knees.... relax your thighs.... relax your buttocks.... Let the relaxation spread to your stomach.... To your lower back...to your chest.... Let go more and more. Feel the relaxation deepening in your shoulders... in your arms... and in your hands.... Deeper and deeper. Notice the feeling of looseness and relaxation in your neck... your jaw... your face ... and your scalp... Continue to breathe slowly and deeply. Your entire body is comfortably loose and relaxed, calm and rested.

Source: Davis M, Eshelman ER, McKay M. The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook. Fifth Edition. New Harbinger Publications, Inc., Oakland, CA, 2000.

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