



It's Time to Relax

Week 4: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

With regular practice, **Progressive Muscle Relaxation** provides you with an intimate familiarity of what tension – and relaxation – feels like in different parts of the body. The awareness will help to counteract initial signs of muscular tension that may accompany stress. As your body relaxes, so will your mind.

The Practice of Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- 1) Loosen your clothing, remove your shoes, and assume a comfortable position.
- 2) Take a few minutes to relax – breathe in and out in slow, deep breaths.
- 3) When relaxed, shift your attention to your right foot. Focus on the way it feels.
- 4) Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot. Squeeze tightly and hold for 10 seconds.
- 5) Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and how your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose.
- 6) Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
- 7) When ready, shift your attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
- 8) Move slowly up through your body – contract and relax the muscle groups as you go.



Tip: Try not to tense muscles other than those intended. This may take practice.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Sequence

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|----------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Right foot* | 6. Left thigh | 11. Right arm and hand |
| 2. Left foot | 7. Hips and buttocks | 12. Left arm and hand |
| 3. Right calf | 8. Stomach | 13. Neck and shoulders |
| 4. Left calf | 9. Chest | 14. Face |
| 5. Right thigh | 10. Back | |

Action Step: Practice muscle relaxation today – Feet, calves, thighs, hips, and buttocks!

Relaxation Techniques to Reduce Stress on-the Spot

- ✓ **Picture yourself relaxed:** Is your mind too talkative to meditate? Try creating a peaceful “dreamscape.” Replace stress with an image that evokes a sense of calm (e.g., fantasy island)
- ✓ **Breathe deeply:** Imagine your center as a deep, powerful place. Feel your breath coming and going as your mind stays focused there. Repeat 10 times, relax more fully each time.
- ✓ **Look around you:** Mindfulness means focusing on one activity at a time, forget multi-tasking! Stress will take a back seat as long as you focus on something in the present.
- ✓ **Show some love:** Cuddle your pet, snuggle your spouse, or talk to a friend about the good things in your lives. Physical contact may help lower blood pressure and decrease stress hormone.
- ✓ **Try self-massage:** Place both hands on your shoulders and neck. Squeeze with your fingers and palms. Rub vigorously, keeping shoulders relaxed.
- ✓ **Take a time out:** When your temper is about to erupt, find a quiet place to sit or lie down and put the stressful situation on hold.
- ✓ **Try a musical detour:** When the going gets rough, take a musical stress detour by aligning your heartbeat with the slow tempo of a relaxing song (e.g., classical music).
- ✓ **Take an attitude break:** Thirty seconds is enough time to shift your heart’s rhythm from stressed to relaxed. Envision anything that triggers a positive feeling (e.g., child, pet).
- ✓ **Go for a walk:** Walk briskly for at least 10 minutes. It is a great way to clear your head. You will be surprised at the clarity and focus you will feel after doing this regularly.
- ✓ **Set goals:** Take time to write down your goals for today, next week, and next year. Reward yourself for meeting daily and weekly goals. Check your list at least once a week.
- ✓ **Be aware of what is happening in your life:** Step back and take an objective look. Is this what you want? What can you do to make changes?



Everyone has the power to make constructive changes in their lives. **Pick one or two of these suggestions and take action!** Always expect the best possible outcome to any situation. *Practice positive thinking.*

Resource: www.webmd.com; www.massgeneral.org