

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise

Progressive muscle relaxation is an exercise that helps to relax and loosen your muscles. It can help lessen your feelings of stress and help you relax when you feel anxious (worried).

There are two steps to this exercise. For the first step, you tighten up muscles in different areas of your body. For the second step, you relax these same muscles. You will learn what your muscles feel like when they are tight and when they are relaxed.

It is important that you do not do any movements of your body that cause you to have pain. If you have pain or discomfort in a muscle, you can skip that step.

It takes about 15 minutes to do this exercise. Have a family member or friend read this exercise out loud to you.

How to do this exercise

1. Find a quiet place where you can relax.
2. Turn off your phone and dim the lights.
3. You can sit or lie down. Make sure you are comfortable. Let your hands rest loosely in your lap or by your side.
4. Close your eyes.
5. Pay attention to your breathing. Notice how your abdomen rises and falls with each breath.
6. Take a long slow deep breath in (inhale) through your nose. Fill your lungs completely.
7. Hold the breath for a moment.
8. Breathe out (exhale) through your mouth. Allow your breath to carry away all stress and tension as the air moves out of your lungs.
9. Take a second, long slow deep breath in through your nose. Fill your lungs completely.
10. Hold the breath for a moment.
11. Exhale through your mouth. Empty your lungs completely.
12. Take a third, long slow deep breath in through your nose.
13. Hold your breath for just a few seconds.
14. Exhale through your mouth. Your body will feel relaxed.
15. Now let your breathing return to normal.
16. Take a long slow deep breath in through your nose and gradually curl your toes down to tense (tighten) the muscles in your feet.
17. Hold the breath and this position for just a few seconds. Now relax the muscles in your feet as you breathe out through your mouth. Feel the tension in your feet go away as you breathe out. Notice how your feet feel different when tensed and when they are relaxed.

18. Inhale again, and as you do, gradually curl your toes down.
19. Hold for just a few seconds. Now release the muscles in your feet as you breathe out. Feel yourself relaxing more with each breath.
20. As you take a long slow deep breath in through your nose, point your toes up towards your knees to tighten the calf muscles (the muscles in the back of your legs).
21. Hold the breath and this position for just a few seconds. Then let those muscles go limp as you exhale through your mouth.
22. Inhale again and tighten your calf muscles.
23. Hold for a few seconds. Now release your calf muscles. Feel your muscles relax, and feel the tension washing away with your out-breath.
24. Now focus on the muscles in the front of your thighs. If you are lying down, you can do this by trying to straighten your legs. You'll feel the muscles pulling your kneecap upwards. If you are seated, you can tense these muscles by pushing your heels down onto the floor.
25. Take a long slow deep breath in through your nose, and tense the muscles in your thighs.
26. Hold the breath and this position for just a few seconds, and then breathe out through your mouth and release this position. As you do this, the blood flow to your muscles increases and you may notice a warm tingling sensation. Enjoy this feeling of soothing relaxation in your thighs.
27. Inhale again and tighten your thigh muscles.
28. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. Focus on letting your muscles go limp and loose as you exhale.
29. Draw in a long slow deep breath through your nose and gradually tighten the muscles in your buttocks.
30. Hold for just a few seconds, and then breathe out through your mouth and release this position. Feel the tension leaving your muscles. Feel them relaxing completely.
31. Inhale again and tighten the muscles in your buttocks.
32. Hold for a few seconds. Now release. You are becoming more and more deeply relaxed.
33. Take another long slow deep breath in through your nose, and this time, gradually tighten all the muscles in your legs, from your feet to your buttocks. Do what feels natural and comfortable to you.
34. Hold the breath and this position for just a few seconds. As you exhale through your mouth release all these large strong muscles. Enjoy the sensation of release as you become even more deeply relaxed.
35. Now bring your awareness to the muscles in your stomach.

36. Draw in a long slow deep breath and tighten your stomach muscles. Imagine you are trying to touch your belly button to your spine.
37. Hold the breath and this position for just a few seconds. Now exhale through your mouth and let your muscles relax. Notice the sensation of relief that comes from letting go.
38. Inhale again, and tighten your stomach muscles.
39. Hold for a few seconds and then let them relax as you exhale and release all tension.
40. Now focus on the muscles in your back.
41. As you take a long slow deep breath in through your nose, arch your back slightly and tighten these muscles.
42. Hold the breath and this position. Now exhale through your mouth and let your muscles relax.
43. Inhale again and as you do, tighten your back muscles.
44. Hold for a few seconds and then relax and release.
45. Now focus on your shoulder muscles and the muscles in your neck.
46. As you take in a long slowly deep breath through your nose, pull your shoulders up towards your ears and squeeze these muscles firmly.
47. Hold for a few seconds. Now breathe out completely through your mouth, and allow your contracted muscles to go loose and limp.
48. Again, inhale and pull your shoulders up towards your ears and squeeze these muscles firmly.
49. Hold for a few seconds, and then feel the tension subside as you relax and breathe out. Take a moment to feel yourself becoming more and more deeply relaxed. You are calm, secure, at peace.
50. Now it's time to let go of all the tension in your arms and hands. Let's start with your upper arms.
51. As you take a long slow deep breath in through your nose, raise your wrists towards your shoulders and tighten the muscles in your upper arms.
52. Hold that breath and the position for a few seconds. Then gently lower your arms and breathe all the way out through your mouth. You may feel a warm, burning sensation in your muscles when you tighten them. Feel how relaxing it is to release that tightness and to breathe away all tension.
53. Again, inhale and curl your upper arms again to tighten the muscles as you breathe in.
54. Hold for a few seconds. Now relax your arms and breathe out.
55. Now focus on your forearms.
56. Draw in a long slow deep breath in through your nose, and curl your hands inwards as though you are trying to touch the inside of your elbows with your fingertips.

57. Hold the breath and this position. Now feel the tension subside as you relax and breathe out through your mouth.
58. Again, inhale and tighten the muscles in your forearms.
59. Hold for a few seconds, and then release. Feel the tension washing away.
60. Now focus on your hands.
61. Take another long slow deep breath in through your nose and tightly clench your fists.
62. Hold the breath and position for just a few seconds, and then release. Notice any feelings of buzzing or throbbing. Your hands are becoming very soft and relaxed.
63. Inhale again and clench your fists.
64. Hold for just a few seconds, and then release. Let your fingers go limp. Take a moment and pay attention to your arms and hands. They are feeling relaxed.
65. Take a couple of nice long slow breaths now, and just relax. Feel yourself slipping even deeper into a state of complete rest.
66. Now focus on the muscles in your face.
67. Take another long slow deep breath in through your nose and squeeze your eyes shut and clench your lips together.
68. Hold the breath and this position for a few seconds. Now breathe out through your mouth and relax all your facial muscles. Feel your face softening.
69. Once more, inhale while you scrunch the muscles in your eyes and lips.
70. Hold for just a few seconds and then release.
71. Now bring your awareness to the muscles in your jaw.
72. Take a long slow deep breath in through your nose, and then open your mouth as wide as you can. Feel your jaw muscles stretching and tightening.
73. Hold the breath and this position for just a few seconds. Now exhale through our mouth and allow your mouth to gently close.
74. Again, inhale through your nose and then open your mouth wide.
75. Hold for just a few seconds. Now let your mouth relax and let your breath flood all the way out.

You are now completely relaxed from the tips of your toes to the top of your head. Take a few more minutes to rest. Relax. Listen to the sound of your breathing and enjoy the lovely, warm sensation of physical relaxation.

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