

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Medically reviewed by [Scientific Advisory Board](#) — Written by Harold Cohen, Ph.D. on February 26, 2018

Progressive muscle relaxation is one of the easiest and most effective relaxation techniques to learn. This relaxation technique has been proven by countless research studies. It teaches you to relax your mind and relieve stress by learning to slowly and *progressively* tensing and then relaxing your muscles, one group at a time. This allows tension to flow away from you as each muscle group relaxes.

Through simple exercise of this technique, most people can pick it up in a few days or weeks. The better you become at it, the easier it becomes. You'll quickly learn the difference between what a tense muscle feels like versus one that is completely relaxed.

Progressive muscle relaxation is easy to learn, and the process is simple. It begins by tensing each muscle group — but without straining them — and then suddenly releasing the tension. You will then feel the muscle relax.

There is no right or wrong way to do progressive muscle relaxation, so this script should act as a guide to finding the right amount of time in between each group, and the right amount of time you hold the tension in each muscle group as you proceed.

Most people find that holding the tension in a muscle group is best at between 5 and 10 seconds. If you have any pain or discomfort at any of the targeted muscle groups feel free to omit that step. Throughout this exercise, many people find it helpful to keep their eyes closed and visualize the muscles tensing as they're doing that. Then it can be helpful to imagine a wave of relaxation flowing over the muscle group as you release that tension. It is important that you keep breathing normally throughout the exercise — do not hold your breath in!

Some people like to start at their feet and work their way up to their head. Others feel it works better for them to work from their head downward. The script below is working from your head down, but you can reverse it just as readily and work from your feet up. Do whatever feels more natural to you.

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Progressive Muscle Relaxation Script

Begin by finding a comfortable position either sitting or lying down in a location where you will not be interrupted. Many people find just sitting in a comfortable chair or on the couch a good position to start with.

Allow your attention to focus only on your body. If you begin to notice your mind wandering, bring it back to the muscle you are working on.

It's perfectly okay and you should accept that your mind will wander during this exercise. Just bring it back to the muscles you're working on when you realize you're thinking about something other than this exercise.

Take a deep breath through your abdomen, hold for a few seconds, and exhale slowly.

As you breathe notice your stomach rising, and your lungs filling with air. Take your time and just spend a minute or two breathing and noticing your breathing.

As you exhale, imagine the tension in your body being released and flowing out of your body.

And again inhale... and exhale.

Feel your body already relaxing.

As you go through each step, *remember to keep breathing normally*. Try not to hold your breath.

* * *

Now let's begin. Tighten the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as high as you can. Hold for about five seconds. And abruptly release feeling that tension fall away.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Now smile widely, feeling your mouth and cheeks tense. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release, appreciating the softness in your face.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

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Hold for about 5 seconds, and release, feeling the tension melting away.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Now feel the weight of your relaxed head and neck sink.

Breath in... and breath out...

Let go of all the stress...

Breath in... and breath out...

Now, tightly, but without straining, clench your right fist and hold this position for about 5 seconds... and release.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Now, feel the tension in your right forearm and hand. Feel that buildup of tension. You may even visualize that set of muscles tightening.

Hold for about 5 seconds... and release, enjoying that feeling of limpness.

Breath in... and breath out...

Now, feel the tension in your entire right arm. Feel that buildup of tension. Tense your entire right arm.

Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.



Now lift your shoulders up as if they could touch your ears. Hold for about 5 seconds, and quickly release, feeling their heaviness.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Let go of all the stress...

Breath in... and breath out...

Now, tightly, but without straining, clench your left fist and hold this position for about 5 seconds... and release.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Now, feel the tension in your left forearm and hand. Feel that buildup of tension. You may even visualize that set of muscles tightening.

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Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Now lift your shoulders up as if they could touch your ears. Hold for about 5 seconds, and quickly release, feeling their heaviness.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Tense your upper back by pulling your shoulders back trying to make your shoulder blades touch. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Tighten your chest by taking a deep breath in, hold for about 5 seconds, and exhale, blowing out all the tension.

Now tighten the muscles in your stomach by sucking in. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Gently arch your lower back. Hold for about 5 seconds... and relax.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Feel the limpness in your upper body letting go of the tension and stress, hold for about 5 seconds, and relax.

Tighten your buttocks. Hold for about 5 seconds... and release, imagine your hips falling loose.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Feel the tension in your entire right leg and thigh. Hold for about 5 seconds... and relax. Feel the tension melting away from your leg.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Now flex your right foot, pulling your toes towards you and feeling the tension in your calves. Hold for about 5 seconds... and relax, feel the weight of your legs sinking down.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Feel the tension in your entire left leg and thigh. Hold for about 5 seconds... and relax. Feel the tension melting away from your leg.

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Curl your toes under tensing your feet. Hold for about 5 seconds, and release.

Pause for about 5-10 seconds, and just breath.

Now imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading through your body beginning at your head and going all the way down to your feet. Each wave feels warm and comforting. Your body is completely relaxed.

Feel the weight of your relaxed body.

Breath in... and breath out...

Breath in... and breath out...

As you breathe notice your stomach rising, and your lungs filling with air. Take your time and just spend a minute or two breathing and noticing your breathing.

As you exhale, imagine the tension in your body being released and flowing out of your body.

And again inhale... and exhale.

Feel your body full relaxed now. You are done and feeling completely relaxed.

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