



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation involves a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body. With regular practice, progressive muscle relaxation gives you an intimate familiarity with what tension—as well as complete relaxation—feels like in different parts of the body. This awareness helps you spot and counteract the first signs of the muscular tension that accompanies stress. And as your body relaxes, so will your mind. You can combine deep breathing with progressive muscle relaxation for an additional level of stress relief.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation for Stress Relief

Consult with your doctor if you have a history of muscle spasms, back problems, or other serious injuries that may be aggravated by tensing muscles. Most progressive muscle relaxation practitioners start at the feet and work their way up to the face. An example of a typical sequence for muscle groups is found below.

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

* If you are left-handed you may want to begin with your left foot instead.

- Loosen your clothing, take off your shoes, and get comfortable.
- Take a few minutes to relax, breathing in and out in slow, deep breaths.
- When you're relaxed and ready to start, shift your attention to your right foot. Take a moment to focus on the way it feels.
- Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10.
- Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose.
- Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
- When you're ready, shift your attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
- Move slowly up through your body, contracting and relaxing the muscle groups as you go.
- It may take some practice at first, but try not to tense muscles other than those intended.

