

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is one of the most popular relaxation exercises and has been shown in clinical studies to reduce muscle tension and lower stress levels. Although it is a simple technique, it usually takes a few days to a few weeks to correctly implement, so it is important that you practice it regularly. The better you become at it, the easier it becomes, and the more relaxed you will feel. PMR begins by tensing each muscle group — without straining them — and then suddenly releasing the tension. It is best to tense the muscle for 5 seconds and then release/relax them for 10 to 15 seconds. There are several detailed PMR scripts that you can easily find on the internet or from self-help books that will guide you through the process. There are also free audio instructions that can easily be found on the internet or YouTube. You can also download paid and free audio exercises on your smartphone. Simply do a search for progressive muscle relaxation.

Tips for the effective practice of PMR

- Sit or lie down in a comfortable position (legs uncrossed).
- Wear comfortable clothing.
- Set aside 10 to 15 minutes to practice every day.
- Choose a place and time where you will be uninterrupted (no phones).
- Practice one to two times a day.
- Tense/hold each muscle for 5 seconds. Then let go and relax for 10 to 15 seconds. Then repeat before moving to the next muscle group.
- Do not strain too hard. Stop if you are feeling any pain.
- Breathe normally during the exercise. Do not hold your breath.
- It is generally easier if you have your eyes closed (although this is not essential).
- Avoid practicing on a full stomach.
- Try not to fall asleep. Relaxation is not the same as sleeping.

Below is a sample sequence of muscle groups to tense/relax. Remember to hold the tension for 5 seconds, release for 10 to 15 seconds, then repeat. Then move on to the next muscle group.

1. Tense your toes by squeezing them inward
2. Tense your feet by squeezing them
3. Tense your calves by squeezing them
4. Tense your upper legs by squeezing them
5. Tense the back of your legs (hamstrings) by squeezing them
6. Tense your buttocks by squeezing them inwards
7. Tense your lower back
8. Tense your stomach/abdomen as if someone was going to step on it
9. Tense your chest by squeezing it inwards
10. Tense your fists and hold
11. Tense your biceps by bring your fists up to your shoulders
12. Tense your back muscles by squeezing them inwards
13. Tense your shoulders and neck by moving your shoulders upwards
14. Tense the back of your neck by gently pushing your head back as if you are looking at the ceiling
15. Clench your teeth and tighten your jaw
16. Tense your eyes and cheeks by squeezing them
17. Tense your forehead by raising your eyebrows as high as you can