

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

When you are scared or anxious, your body becomes tense. This can generate symptoms of pain in the shoulders, neck or back, or tension in the jaw, arms or legs. To train yourself to progressively release this tension, start by intentionally tensing specific groups of muscles, and relaxing them.



Focus on the difference of feeling between the tense and relaxed state of the muscles. Practice on different parts of the body: the head, face, neck, shoulder, back, stomach, buttocks, arms, hands, legs or feet. Increase tension and hold it for 5 seconds; then release and hold for 10 seconds. Find the tempo that suits you. Increase the tension and release the tension ten times in each muscle group, with a short pause in between.

- Start by focusing on your hands. Make a fist, hold it for 5 seconds, release for 10. Notice the difference between the tense and released states. Do it once more.
- Move the focus to your arms. Pull your forearms towards your shoulder. Feel the tension in your upper arms. Hold for 5 seconds, release for 10. Notice the difference. Do it once more.
- Stretch your arm out and lock the elbow. Feel the tension in the triceps. Hold for 5 seconds, release for 10. Notice the difference. Repeat. When your arms are relaxed, let them rest in your lap.
- Focus on your face. Increase the tension in your forehead, lift your eyebrows. Notice the tension. Hold for 5 seconds, release for 10. Notice the difference. Repeat.
- Increase the tension in your jaw. Hold. Release. Repeat.
- Focus on the muscles in your neck. Bend your neck so that your chin touches your chest, turn your head slowly to the left, bring it back to the centre, bend it back, bring it back to the centre, turn it to the right, bring it back to the centre. Repeat slowly since there is often a lot of tension in this area.
- Focus on your shoulders. Lift them. Hold and notice the tension. Release. Notice the difference. Repeat.
- Focus on the shoulder blades. Pull them back. Increase the tension. Relax. Notice the difference and repeat.
- Stretch your back by sitting in a very upright position. Hold the tension and relax, notice the difference and repeat.
- Increase the tension in your buttocks. Hold for 5 seconds and release, notice the difference, repeat.
- Hold your breath. Pull your stomach in, tighten it, and relax. Notice the difference, repeat.
- Focus on your legs. Stretch them out, feel the tension in your thighs, hold and relax.
- Straighten your legs again; this time make your toes point towards you. Notice the tension in the back of your legs, and the feeling of relaxation when you release. Repeat.
- Focus on your toes, make them point downwards as far as you can. Feel the tension and release.
- Scan your whole body. Does any part still feel tense? Repeat the exercise for this part.
- Imagine that a relaxed feeling is spreading through your whole body. Your body feels warm, perhaps a little heavier, relaxed.