

Stress Management: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

What is progressive muscle relaxation?

Progressive muscle relaxation is an effective method for treating stress and anxiety. Concentrating on relaxing your muscles makes it difficult to think about problems and events that cause stress and anxiety.

In these exercises you focus on specific muscle groups, one at a time, tensing and relaxing each group while breathing slowly and deeply. Audio tapes that teach this technique are available at many bookstores.



How do I do this exercise?

Sit in a chair with your back straight, head in line with your spine, both feet on the floor, and hands resting on your lap. Tighten each muscle group and keep it tightened for 15 to 20 seconds. Then relax slowly and notice the difference between tension and relaxation.

It is best to start at the head and work down the body or start at the feet and work up. The muscle groups to tighten and relax are:

forehead and scalp

eyes

nose

face

tongue

jaws

lips

neck

upper arm

lower arm and hands

chest

stomach

back

buttocks and thighs

legs

feet.

For example, you can tighten your neck muscles by pulling your chin in and shrugging your shoulders. Hold the tension for 15 to 20 seconds. Then relax slowly.

Exercise all muscle groups twice a day. Each exercise session should last 12 to 15 minutes.

Other relaxation methods you may wish to consider are mental imaging and diaphragmatic breathing.

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