

Stress Management: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

What is progressive muscle relaxation?

Progressive muscle relaxation is an effective way to treat stress and anxiety. Concentrating on relaxing your muscles makes it harder to think about stressful problems and events. Progressive muscle relaxation is also a way to relax muscles that have become tense from chronic stress.

When you do these exercises you focus on specific muscle groups, one at a time. You tense and relax each group while you breathe slowly and deeply. You can buy audio programs at many bookstores that teach this technique.

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.

You can 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 want to try are mental imaging and deep breathing. If you have serious problems from muscle tension, see your healthcare provider, who may want to treat you or refer you to a physical therapist or physiologist.

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