

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Relaxation

First, it's important to understand that I'm not using the word 'relaxation' here to mean watching television, gardening, or having a glass or two of your favourite drink...while each of these things might have a place in your life, let's call them methods of recreation.

Relaxation on the other hand, is the process of reducing and preventing stress and tension in your body and mind. Relaxation is essential to help create and maintain balance from the normal and sometimes above-normal stress that we are all faced with at times. While stress is important to give us drive and energy to achieve things in life, it can take a toll on physical and mental health... relaxation helps bring about a reduction in stress, restores energy, can assist with chronic illness and generally results in improved self-esteem and health.

There are many forms of relaxation including meditation, mindfulness, yoga, breathing techniques, hypnosis and visualization.

In this blog, I talk about the relaxation process of Progressive Muscle Relaxation. This is an easy technique to learn and put into practice, and can be done just about anywhere, any time.

What is Progressive Muscle Relaxation?

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a relaxation exercise that combines a physical form of relaxation with a form of mindfulness.

By encouraging you to focus on the physical tension and relaxation of each muscle group in your body, it teaches you, and your muscles, to let go of tension, stress and anxiety. Focusing your mind on this tension-relaxation process, means that you will no longer be 'thinking' about, or focusing on problems or issues that worry you.

PMR is a way that you can relax both your mind and your body.

The two step process of tension-relaxation provides you with an immediate feeling of relaxation, but the more you practice this exercise, the more you, and your body, will recognize throughout the day, when you are becoming physically tense.

This recognition will provide you with a cue that you may be becoming increasingly anxious. At that point, by doing a brief form of PMR, you can let go of the tension and prevent the anxiety from building.



Some helpful hints before beginning Progressive Muscle Relaxation

1. **Set aside some time - a full PMR will take about 20 minutes (see later for discussion of a quick method of PMR)**
2. **Find a place to sit or lie comfortably where you won't be disturbed**
3. **Don't be so comfortable that you will fall asleep - the purpose of this exercise isn't to assist you to sleep - although you can use it for this purpose AFTER you have mastered the skill**
4. **Practice practice practice... like any skill, PMR needs to be learned. Practice the full exercise twice a day for four weeks. Only then consider reducing it to once a day.**
5. **Practice this exercise whether you feel tense or not. As you practice every day, the benefits will quickly 'kick in' when you need them in everyday life.**
6. **Because muscles are tensed, be aware of any injuries or pain– skip any areas that are affected, or check with you doctor or physical therapist first**
7. **When doing the exercise, pay attention, really focus on the tension you feel in each muscle, and really focus on the relaxed feeling when letting go.**
8. **Wear loose, non-constricting comfortable clothing**
9. **Be Careful! If you have any muscle, tendon or bone problems, tensing your muscles may not be advisable. If you have any of these problems, first, check with you doctor or health practitioner, and then only use gentle, slow tension if doing this exercise...or choose another relaxation exercise more appropriate to your injury.**

How To Do It



The two-step process : an outline before you begin

The Tension – Relaxation Response

1 : Tension



The first step is to focus on and tense each muscle group in a specific part of your body. This step is essentially the same regardless of which muscle group you are targeting. For example, focus on your left hand. Next, take a slow, deep breath, make a fist and squeeze the muscles as hard as you can and hold it for about 7 seconds.

As you're doing this, really focus your attention on the tension in the muscles. There may be some slight discomfort which is normal (remember, any pain or severe discomfort, reduce the tension, or by-pass that muscle group).

Another normal response of the body, is that when you're tensing one muscle group (like your fist), other muscles are also likely to tense - such as your biceps or shoulders as you make a fist. It is really important to tense only the specific muscle group we focus on...do what you can to reduce the tension to surrounding muscles.

2 : Relaxation



This step involves **quickly** relaxing the tensed muscles. After holding the tension for about 7 seconds, very quickly let all the tightness flow out of the tensed muscles. Exhale as you do this step.

Feel the muscles become loose and limp, as the tension flows out, and **very deliberately focus on and notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. This is an essential part of PMR - here, you are teaching your body and mind the difference between the tensed and relaxed state of your muscles.**

After about 10—15 seconds, move on to the next muscle group as in the scrip below, repeating each tension and relaxation steps. When you have completed all muscle groups, sit quietly for a few minutes to enjoy the deep state of relaxation.

A full script of PMR, with step-by-step instructions is available from inSync for life. Check our website and contact us for this free material:

www.insyncforlife.com.au