

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is an exercise that reduces stress and anxiety in your body by guiding you to slowly tense and then relax each muscle. Doing this triggers your body's relaxation response and takes your mind off your thoughts for a while. You could do the exercise at bedtime to help you prepare for sleep.

Read through the following steps a few times and try to memorise them. This will help you get the most out of the exercise, as you'll be more able to relax without having to use the sheet.

You can also do this exercise by listening to a YouTube video, using this link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=86HUcX8ZtAk>

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. Close your eyes if you'd like to.
2. Start by taking a deep breath through your nose. Noticing the feeling of air as it fills your lungs. Pause for a moment. Then release the breath, exhaling through your mouth.
3. Take another deep breath, even slower than the first one. Blow or sigh out the air as you exhale. Imagine the stress or anxiety leaving your body through your breath. Take a couple more deep breaths in this way.
4. Now move your attention to the very top of your head, then on your forehead and face. Begin to tense your forehead by scrunching up your eyebrows as if you were really angry. Scrunch up your nose and lips too. Hold that tension tightly for 5 seconds. Notice how it feels.
5. Now, release the tension in your forehead. Notice the new feeling of relaxation.
6. Take another slow, deep breath, in through your nose and out through your mouth.
7. Now move your focus down to your shoulders. Tense them up by firmly shrugging your shoulders up to your ears. Squeeze them back towards each other. Feel the tension and hold it for 5 seconds. As you exhale on your next breath, blow out the air and let your shoulders fall. Notice the feeling of relaxation in the neck and upper back.
8. Now move down your arms to your hands. Clench your hands into tight fists as hard as you can. Hold for 5-10 seconds and feel the tension in your fingers, wrists and arms.

Again, as you breathe out, release your hands and let them go limp. Notice how they now feel more comfortable and relaxed.

9. Move down to your stomach. While you breathe in, tense up your abdominal muscles by sucking your belly in firmly. Hold for 5 seconds. As you exhale, release your belly to its natural shape. Notice the feeling of relaxation as your belly gently moves with your breath again.
10. Now pay attention to your legs. Tense up your legs and bottom by squeezing your thighs together. Squeeze a little bit harder and hold it for 10 seconds. And release.
11. Now move down to your feet. Scrunch up your feet and toes, as hard as you can without hurting them. Hold for 5 seconds again. Breathe out and release the tension. Gently wiggle your toes and notice how comfortable they feel.
12. Take 3 more deep breaths. Notice the feeling of cool air entering your nostrils, filling your lungs, and leaving through your mouth. Let your chest and shoulders rise and fall.
13. Finally, tense up your whole body. Squeeze your eyebrows, shoulders and fists. Suck in your belly and squeeze your thighs together, scrunch up your toes. Tense as hard as you can without it hurting and hold for 5-10 seconds.
14. Release all the tension from your entire body. Let your limbs and muscles go limp and completely relaxed. Notice the feeling of complete relaxation and how it feels different from tension. Take 3 more deep breaths.
15. Now, let your breathing gradually return to normal. Begin to wake up your muscles by gently wiggling and moving. Open your eyes and stretch when you're ready.