

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

This exercise involves systematically tensing and relaxing different muscle groups. This is a good relaxation exercise for those who have trouble concentrating, or experience racing thoughts or other mental distractions. You may leave your eyes open or close them, as you prefer. Experiment with how much you tense your target muscles: some find tensing tightly is most helpful, while others use "threshold tensing," just tightening enough to barely sense the tension.

Start out by taking a few deep breaths into the abdomen. Just notice the breath.

Do a simple check-in of your emotional state, your thoughts, and what you are feeling in your body. Just notice what is happening, without judgment or expectation.

Make a fist with your right hand, and tense the muscles in your right forearm, allowing the rest of the arm to remain relaxed.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the opposite arm, and in the rest of the body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. You may imagine it's like a fire hose that was rigid and becomes more flexible as the water drains out, or a any image that works for you.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Repeat this with your left fist and forearm.

Raise your right shoulder, pin your right upper arm to the side of your body, and tense the muscles in the right upper arm and shoulder.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the opposite arm, and in the rest of the body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. Find an image that captures this gradual release of tension for you: the sun melting ice, butter melting, releasing pressure with a valve, et cetera.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Repeat this with your left upper arm and shoulder.

With your leg extended, bend your right foot up at an angle, so the muscles of your right calf, shin, ankle and foot are tensed. Allow the rest of the leg to remain relaxed.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of the leg, and in the rest of the body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles. You may imagine it's like a fire hose that was rigid and becomes more flexible as the water drains out.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Repeat this with your left foot and lower leg.

Tense the muscles in the right buttock and thigh, allowing the remaining muscles in the right leg to remain as relaxed as possible.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the opposite buttock and thigh, and in the rest of the body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Repeat this on the left side.

Suck in your abdominal muscles, and simultaneously push the small of your back against the chair or floor. Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of your body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Let your head fall forward, or, alternatively, press your head backward against a wall, to tense the muscles in the back of your neck.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of your body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Push your tongue against your upper palette, purse your lips, squint your eyes, tighten your jaw and scrunch up your face.

Study the sensations of tension.

Compare the tensed muscles to the relaxed ones in the rest of your body.

When you're ready, take a deep breath in, and, as you exhale, slowly, gradually release all of the tension, until every last bit has left the tensed muscles.

Spend a few moments studying and appreciating the sensations in the muscles once they are relaxed.

Take a few slow, deep breaths, and allow yourself to be aware of the sensations throughout your body. If there is any part that remains tense, repeat the exercise there until the tension is gone. Just allow the relaxation to move through your body in waves, allowing yourself to relax more, and more, and more deeply as you continue to take slow, deep breaths. If you like the seashore, you may want to think of gentle waves lapping at the sand, gradually washing away physical, and emotional, and mental tension, soothing ... soothing ...relaxing.

When you are done with the relaxation exercise, allow yourself a few minutes to reorient before getting up. Just enjoy the sensations of relaxation throughout your body. You may notice sensations you have never been aware of before.