

Progressive Muscle Relaxation Exercise

1. Start by sitting upright in a relaxed position, not bent over or slouching a lot; sit with your neck naturally straight - or - lie flat on your back.
2. Begin the progressive muscle relaxation exercise by closing your eyes (if that's comfortable for you - otherwise look at the wall or the floor or a picture) and then allowing your mental focus to rest entirely on the sensations of each muscle group.
3. Begin at head and move down or begin at the feet and move up, working one group of muscles at a time. For each muscle group, inhale/tense muscles, hold muscles/hold breath, and then exhale/relax.
 - a. For example: Inhaling, tense your toes, curl them tight, tight, tight. Now exhale and release. Feel the warmth flood into them. Feel the energy and warmth suffuse those muscles. With each exhalation, feel the warmth flowing into the toes.
 - b. Repeat the tense, hold, and release three times for each muscle group. It is amazing how much tension remains after just one or two tightenings - the third can make a big difference - it's the secret sauce!
4. Notice the warmth and then energy that flows into your muscles as you release the tension.
5. The order of muscle groups can be:
 - a. scalp: raise eyebrow to tighten scalp
 - b. forehead: wrinkle brow (worry face)
 - c. face: squint eyes, purse mouth to tighten face (like biting a lemon)
 - d. neck: do not make neck circles, but rather, let your head drop forward with the weight of the head pulling your chin toward your chest, and you will feel the stretch down the back, possibly even down to your lower back. Then slowly return your head to a full upright position before leaning in the opposite direction. Tilt to one side, with the ear moving directly toward the shoulder, and you will feel the stretch as far down as the shoulder blade. When your head returns upright, feel the warmth flow in where the stretching was.
 - e. shoulders: raise shoulders up, like hunching them and release the tension.
 - f. arms: tighten the forearm, wrist and hand by clenching the fist.
 - g. back and abdomen: tighten this area by imagining a string pulling your belly button (navel) toward the spine and then release.
 - h. buttocks: tighten by squeezing together
 - i. thighs: tense quadriceps and press your knees together
 - j. calves and shins: tighten by pointing toes and feel the stretch down the shin and the contraction in the calf. Then reverse, by pulling the toe up and pushing the heel forward. Feel the stretch down the calf and the contraction in the shin.
 - k. feet and toes: tighten by either curling the toes or pushing the foot into the earth. Or you can point your toes, or flex your feet pointing with your heels.
6. If going top-down, keep adding the sense of energy flowing down through the relaxed muscles, and end with the awareness of the soles of the feet feeling connected to the earth through the floor.
7. If going bottom up, end with the energy flowing in with each breath and now coursing down through the body with each exhalation.

Gratefully adapted from Dr. M. Wehrenberg's [The 10 Best-Ever Anxiety Management Techniques: How Your Brain Makes You Anxious & What You Can Do About It](#) & [The 10 Best-Ever Anxiety Management Techniques Workbook](#), which includes a CD with an audio version of this practice and nine others. A great 2 minute version of PMR available on YouTube: [The Tranquilizer: Self-Muscle Relaxation](#), from Jordan Friedman, MPH.