

MINDFULNESS

Progressive Muscle Relaxation



Progressive muscle relaxation is an exercise that reduces stress and anxiety in your body by having you slowly tense and then relax each muscle. This exercise is often reported as an effective one in providing an immediate sense of relaxation, but in order to get the best of this and to be able to use it during challenging times, it is best to practice frequently. With experience, you will become more aware of when you are experiencing tension and you will have the skills to help you relax.

During this exercise each muscle should be tensed, but not to the point of strain. If you have any injuries or pain, you can skip the affected areas. Pay special attention to the feeling of releasing tension in each muscle and the resulting feeling of relaxation.

To begin simply sit back or lie down in a comfortable position, though there is nothing stopping you from trying this while standing making it a useful technique in stressful situations where you cannot sit or lay down.

If possible, shut your eyes to help bring your awareness to the muscle that you are focusing on. Take a deep breath and noticing the feeling of air filling your lungs. Hold your breath for a few seconds, then slowly release the breath. Pay attention to this effect overall. Most note feeling a certain amount of tension decreasing just doing this initial action. Repeat this three to five more times.

Now for the main technique:

Bring your attention to your feet (or foot if you want to slow the exercise down for further benefit). Begin to tense your feet by curling your toes and the arch of your foot almost to the point of maximum strain. Hold onto the tension for a few seconds and simply notice what it feels like. On an out breath, release the tension in your foot and pay attention to any feelings of relaxation as you immediately reduce the tension.

Pause for a moment paying attention to your breath, then focus on your feet again, this time bringing the level of tension up about half of what you did the first time. Hold the tension again, then with the outbreath, slowly relieve the tension.

Continue with this for the rest of your body. Focus on the calves, then your thighs, then your stomach, then your hands, your arms, your shoulders and finally, your jaw. As you progress through each area of the body, focus on slowing down the breath. You can then go in the reverse order when you have finished.

Many who have learned how to use this technique have reported better being able to deal with everyday life challenges as well as reducing the symptoms of dealing with pain, panic, anxiety and even depression.