

THE PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION TECHNIQUE

Use this script to learn the progressive muscle relaxation exercise. You can begin at either the head or the toes—this script begins with the toes.

Instructions:

1. Make sure you are in a relaxed position, but not in a bent position, sitting with your neck upright or lying flat.
2. Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so and then allow your focus to rest entirely on the sensations of each muscle group.
3. Now focus your attention on your toes. Tense your toes—curl them tight, tight, tight or imagine pushing your foot into the earth. Now release. Feel the warmth flood into them. Feel the energy and warmth suffuse those muscles. With each exhalation of breath, feel how warmth flows into the toes. (Repeat the tense, hold and release three times before moving to the next muscle group. It is amazing how much tension remains after just one or two tightenings.)
4. Now focus on your calves and shins. Tighten them by pointing your toes and feel the stretch down your shin and the contraction in your calf. Then reverse by pulling your toes up and pushing the heel forward. Feel the stretch down your calf and the contraction in your shin. (Again, repeat the tense, hold, and release three times, and each time notice the warmth and energy that suffuses the muscles as tension is released.)
5. Now focus on your thighs, tightening them by using the muscles above the knees and using the buttocks as little as possible. (Repeat three times, noticing warmth and energy.)
6. Now focus on your buttocks. Tighten them by squeezing them together. (Repeat three times, noticing warmth and energy.)
7. Now focus on your back and abdomen. Tighten this area by imagining a string pulling your belly button toward your spine. (Repeat three times, noticing warmth and energy.)
8. Now focus on your arms. Tighten your forearm, wrist, and hand by clenching your fist. (Repeat three times, noticing warmth and energy.)
9. Now focus on your shoulders. Raise your shoulders up, hunching them. (Repeat three times, noticing warmth and energy.)
10. Now focus on your neck. Do not make neck circles, because those are hard on the spine, but rather let your head drop forward with the weight of it pulling

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your chin toward your chest. You will feel the stretch down your back, even as far as your lower back if you are very tight. Then return your head to a full upright position before leaning it back in the opposite direction. Then tilt it to one side, with your ear moving directly toward your shoulder. 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. (Repeat three times, noticing warmth and energy.)

11. Now focus on your face. Squint your eyes and purse your mouth to tighten your face. (Repeat three times, noticing warmth and energy.)
12. Now focus on your forehead. Wrinkle your brow. (Repeat three times, noticing warmth and energy.)
13. Now focus on your scalp. Raise your eyebrows to tighten your scalp. (Repeat three times, noticing warmth and energy.)
14. Feel the energy flowing in with each breath and coursing down through your body with each exhalation. (If you began your script with the head rather than the toes, notice the energy flowing down through the relaxed muscles and end with the awareness of the soles of your feet feeling connected to the earth through the floor.

Progressive muscle relaxation can be fun at very young ages. For smaller children, use images of animals they can relate to (a cat stretching out in the sun, a lion opening its mouth to yawn) to lead them through.

“ Stretch and release” instead of “ tense and release” works very well.

Adolescents can benefit with adult ways of doing relaxation but are sensitive to not appearing foolish. Also note that many children do not like being singled out to do this, so stretching as a group exercise can be beneficial to helping them learn.