

Appendix D: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Muscle tension is commonly associated with stress, anxiety, and fear. Sometimes we don't even notice how our muscles become tense but you may clench your teeth so your jaw feels tight or maybe your shoulders become stiff or tight. Muscles tension can also be associated with backaches and headaches.

One method of reducing muscle tension found helpful is a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). In PMR exercises, you tense up particular muscles and then relax them.

Preparing for Relaxation:

When you're beginning to practice PMR, keep in mind the following points:

- Set aside at least 15 minutes to complete the exercise.
- Find a place you can do this without being disturbed. Turn off the TV and use soft lighting.
- Try this exercise twice a day for the first couple of weeks. The more you become more comfortable with this exercise, the quicker it will "kick in" when you really need it!
- Start doing this exercise when you're already calm – that way, as you practice, it will be easier to relax when you're feeling anxious.
- Use a chair that comfortably seats your body, including your head. Wear loose clothing and take off your shoes.
- Avoid practicing PMR after heavy meals and do not practice after consuming alcohol.

General Procedures:

- Once you've set aside the time and place for relaxation, slow down your breathing and give yourself permission to relax.
- When you're ready to begin, tense the muscle group described. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
- Relax the muscle and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say something like "relax" or "breathe" as you relax the muscle.
- When you've finished the relaxation procedure, remain seated for a few moments to allow yourself to become alert and oriented to your surroundings.

Practice Means Progress:

Through practice can you become more aware of your muscles, how they response to tension, and how you can relax them. Training your body to respond effectively to stress is like any training—practice is the key.

Have a look at a Relaxation Sequence that you can try – you can read it yourself or you can have someone read it for you, so you can focus solely on relaxing.

Relaxation Sequence

Pay special attention to the feeling of releasing tension in each muscle and the resulting feeling of relaxation. Let us begin.

1. Sit back or lie down in a comfortable position. Shut your eyes if that's more comfortable.
2. Begin by taking a deep breath and noticing the feeling of air filling your lungs. Hold your breath for a few seconds.
3. (brief pause)
4. Release the breath slowly and let the tension leave your body.
5. Take in another deep breath and hold it.
6. (brief pause)
7. Again, slowly release the air.
8. Even slower now, take another breath. Fill your lungs and hold the air.
9. (brief pause)
10. Slowly release the breath and imagine the feeling of tension leaving your body.
11. Now, move your attention to your feet. Begin to tense your feet by curling your toes and the arch of your foot. Hold onto the tension and notice what it feels like.
12. (5 second pause)
13. Release the tension in your foot. Notice the new feeling of relaxation.
14. Next, begin to focus on your lower leg. Tense the muscles in your calves. Hold them tightly and pay attention to the feeling of tension
15. (5 second pause)
16. Release the tension from your lower legs. Again, notice the feeling of relaxation. Remember to continue taking deep breaths.
17. Next, tense the muscles of your upper leg and pelvis. You can do this by tightly squeezing your thighs together. Make sure you feel tenseness without going to the point of strain.
18. (5 second pause)
19. And release. Feel the tension leave your muscles.
20. Begin to tense your stomach and chest. You can do this by sucking your stomach in. Squeeze harder and hold the tension. A little bit longer.
21. (5 second pause)
22. Release the tension. Allow your body to go limp. Notice the feeling of relaxation.
23. Continue taking deep breaths. Breathe in slowly, noticing the air fill your lungs, and hold.

24. (brief pause)
25. Release the air slowly. Feel it leaving your lungs.
26. Next, tense the muscles in your back by bringing your shoulders together behind you. Hold them tightly.
27. Tense them as hard as you can without straining and keep holding.
28. (5 second pause)
29. Release the tension from your back. Feel the tension slowly leaving your body and the new feeling of relaxation. Notice how different your body feels when you allow it to relax.
30. Tense your arms all the way from your hands to your shoulders. Make a fist and squeeze all the way up your arm. Hold it.
31. (5 second pause)
32. Release the tension from your arms and shoulders. Notice the feeling of relaxation in your fingers, hands, arms, and shoulders. Notice how your arms feel limp and at ease.
33. Move up to your neck and your head. Tense your face and your neck by distorting the muscles around your eyes and mouth.
34. (5 second pause)
35. Release the tension. Again, notice the new feeling of relaxation.
36. Finally, tense your entire body. Tense your feet, legs, stomach, chest, arms, head, and neck. Tense harder, without straining. Hold the tension.
37. (5 second pause)
38. Now release. Allow your whole body to go limp. Pay attention to the feeling of relaxation, and how different it is from the feeling of tension.
39. Begin to wake your body up by slowly moving your muscles. Adjust your arms and legs.
40. Stretch your muscles and open your eyes when you're ready.

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