

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

PMR teaches you how to relax your muscles through a two-step process. First, you systematically tense particular muscle groups in your body, such as your neck and shoulders. Next, you release the tension and notice how your muscles feel when you relax them

Helpful Hints

Set aside time

Set aside about 15 minutes to complete this exercise.



Find a place

Find a place where you can complete this exercise without being disturbed.

Practice!

Remember to practise progressive muscle relaxation often. This will make the exercise even more effective when you need to relax. Though it may feel a bit tedious at first, you will gain a great relaxation skill



How to do it

1. Tensing

The first step is applying muscle tension to a specific part of the body. This step is the same regardless of which muscle group you are targeting.

- First, focus on the target muscle group, for example, your left hand. Next, take a slow, deep breath and squeeze the muscles as hard as you can for about 5 seconds. It is important to *really feel* the tension in the muscles, which may even cause a bit of discomfort or shaking. In this instance, you would be making a tight fist with your left hand.
- It is easy to accidentally tense other surrounding muscles (for example, the shoulder or arm), so try to **ONLY** tense the muscles you are targeting. Isolating muscle groups gets easier with practice.
- **Be Careful!** Take care not to hurt yourself while tensing your muscles. You should never feel intense or shooting pain while completing this exercise. Make the muscle tension deliberate, yet gentle. If you have problems with pulled muscles, broken bones, or any medical issues that would hinder physical activity, consult your doctor first.

2. Relaxing tense muscles

This step involves quickly relaxing the tensed muscles.

- After about 5 seconds, let all the tightness flow out of the tensed muscles. Exhale as you do this step. You should feel the muscles become loose and limp, as the tension flows out.
- **It is important to very deliberately focus on and notice the difference between the tension and relaxation. This is the most important part of the whole exercise.**
- Remain in this relaxed state for about 15 seconds, and then move on to the next muscle group. Repeat the tension-relaxation steps.
- After completing all of the muscle groups, take some time to enjoy the deep state of relaxation.
- **Note:** It can take time to learn to relax the body and notice the difference between tension and relaxation. At first, it can feel uncomfortable to be focusing on your body, but this can become quite enjoyable over time.

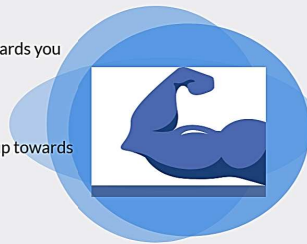
The different muscle groups

During this exercise, you will be working with almost all the major muscle groups in your body.

To make it easier to remember, start with your feet and systematically move up (or if you prefer, you can do it in the reverse order, from your forehead down to your feet).

For example:

- **Foot** -curl your toes downward
- **Lower leg and foot** -tighten your calf muscle by pulling toes towards you
- **Entire leg** -squeeze thigh muscles while doing above
- *Repeat on other side of body*
- **Hand** -clench your fist
- **Entire right arm** -tighten your biceps by drawing your forearm up towards your shoulder and "make a muscle", while clenching fist
- *Repeat on other side of body*
- **Buttocks** -tighten by pulling your buttocks together
- **Stomach** -suck your stomach in
- **Chest** -tighten by taking a deep breath
- **Neck and shoulders** -raise your shoulders up to touch your ears
- **Mouth** -open your mouth wide enough to stretch the hinges of your jaw
- **Eyes** -clench your eyelids tightly shut
- **Forehead** -raise your eyebrows as far as you can



It can be helpful to listen to someone guide you through these steps. There are many scripts and recordings available online that you can access.