

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Our bodies respond automatically to stressful situations and thoughts by becoming tense. The opposite relationship also works: a good way of relaxing the mind is to deliberately relax the body.

In a progressive muscle relaxation each muscle group is tensed in turn, and the tension is then released. This relaxes the muscles and allows you to notice the contrast between tension and relaxation.

Relaxation should be enjoyable so if any part of the exercise is too difficult skip it for the moment. If you have any injuries you may wish to leave out that part of the exercise.

Preparation

Lie down flat on your back, on a firm bed, a couch, or on the floor. Support your head and neck with a pillow or cushion. Alternatively, sit in a comfortable chair with your head well-supported. Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so.

Instructions

Focus your attention on different parts of your body in sequence. Go through the sequence three times:

- 1) *Tense & release: Tense that body part, hold it for a few moments, then relax*
- 2) *Lightly tense & release: Tense that body part with just enough tension to notice, then relax*
- 3) *Release only: Just pay attention to each muscle group and decide to relax it*

Recommended sequence

- 1 Right hand & arm
(clench the fist & tighten the muscles in the arm)
- 2 Left hand & arm
- 3 Right leg
(tense the leg, lifting the knee slightly)
- 4 Left leg
- 5 Stomach & chest
- 6 Back muscles
(pull the shoulders back slightly)
- 7 Neck & throat
(push the head back slightly into the pillow/surface)
- 8 Face
(scrunch up the muscles in your face)

