

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.

An easy way to do that is through progressive muscle relaxation where you tense one muscle group at a time, then release the tension. This relaxes the muscles and allows you to notice the contrast between tension and relaxation.

Relaxation should be enjoyable. 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, 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 and arm
(clench the fist & tighten the muscles in the arm)
- 2 Left hand and arm
- 3 Right leg
(tense the leg, lifting the knee slightly)
- 4 Left leg
- 5 Stomach and 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 of your face)

