

This Progressive Relaxation Procedure is yours to use and to distribute as you see fit.

Jacobson's Progressive Relaxation Procedure

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Edmund Jacobson created the progressive relaxation method. At the beginning of the 20th century, he conceived a method to relax, the goal was to achieve mental tranquillity by progressively eliminating all muscular tensions. It is intended to teach you to relax step by step all the different groups of muscles in your body.

The relaxation works on the Peripheral Nervous System (PNS) the opposite way from stress, so one can't be anxious and relaxed at the same time. It is important that you carry it out correctly and on a daily basis, until you master it and you will be able to do it whenever and wherever you wish.

NOTE: Be careful before practicing PMR; you should consult with your physician if you have a history of serious injuries, muscle spasms, or back problems, because the deliberate muscle tensing of the PMR procedure could exacerbate any of these pre-existing conditions. **If you continue with this procedure, you do so at your own risk.**

The PMR procedure teaches you to relax your muscles through a two-step process. First you deliberately apply tension to certain muscle groups, and then you stop the tension and turn your attention to noticing how the muscles relax as the tension flows away.

Through repetitive practice you quickly learn to recognize and distinguish the associated feelings of a tensed muscle and a completely relaxed muscle. With this simple knowledge, you can then induce physical muscular relaxation at the first signs of the tension that accompanies anxiety... and with physical relaxation comes mental calmness... in any situation.

Here are some suggestions for practice:

- ! Always practice full PMR in a quiet place, alone, with no electronic distractions, not even background music.
- ! Remove your shoes and wear loose clothing.
- ! Avoid eating, smoking, or drinking. It's best to practice before meals rather than after, for the sake of your digestive processes.
- ! **Never practice after using any intoxicants.**
- ! Sit in a comfortable chair if possible. You may practice lying down, but this increases the likelihood of falling asleep.
- ! If you fall asleep, give yourself credit for the work you did up to the point of sleep.

- ! If you practice in bed at night, plan on falling asleep before you complete your cycle. Therefore, consider a practice session at night, in bed, to be in addition to your basic practice.
- ! When you finish a session, relax with your eyes closed for a few seconds, and then get up slowly. (Orthostatic hypotension—a sudden drop in blood pressure due to standing up quickly—can cause you to faint.) Some people like to count backwards from 5 to 1, timed to slow, deep breathing, and then say, “Eyes open. Supremely calm. Fully alert.”

Tension–Relaxation Procedure

Step One: Tension.

The process of applying tension to a muscle is essentially the same regardless of which muscle group you are using. First, focus your mind on the muscle group; for example, your right hand. Then inhale and simply squeeze the muscles as hard as you can for about 8 seconds; in the example, this would involve making a tight fist with your hand.

NOTE: Beginners usually make the mistake of allowing muscles other than the intended group to tense as well; in the example, this would be tensing muscles in your right arm and shoulder, not just in your right hand. With practice you will learn to make very fine discriminations among muscles; for the moment just do the best you can.

It's important to really feel the tension. Done properly, the tension procedure will cause the muscles to start to shake, and you will feel some pain.

NOTE: Be careful not to hurt yourself, as compared to feeling mild pain. Contracting the muscles in your feet and your back, especially, can cause serious problems if not done carefully; therefore do it gently but deliberately.

Step Two: Releasing the Tension.

This is the best part because it is actually pleasurable. After the 8 seconds, just quickly and suddenly let go. Let all the tightness and pain flow out of the muscles as you simultaneously exhale. In the example, this would be imagining tightness and pain flowing out of your hand through your fingertips as you exhale. Feel the muscles relax and become loose and limp, tension flowing away like water out of a faucet. Focus on and notice the difference between tension and relaxation.

NOTE: The point here is to really focus on the change that occurs as the tension is let go. Do this very deliberately, because you are trying to learn to make some very subtle distinctions between muscular tension and muscular relaxation.

Stay relaxed for about 15 seconds, and then repeat the tension-relaxation cycle. You'll probably notice more sensations the second time.

The Full PMR Schedule

Sit in a comfortable chair – reclining arm chairs are ideal. Lying on a bed is okay too. Get as comfortable as possible – no tight clothes or shoes and don't cross your legs.

- ! Take a deep breath; let it out slowly.
- ! Again.

What you'll be doing is alternately tensing (STEP ONE) and relaxing (STEP TWO) specific groups of muscles. After tension, a muscle will be more relaxed than prior to the tensing.

Concentrate on the feel of the muscles, specifically the contrast between tension and relaxation. In time, you will recognize tension in any specific muscle and be able to reduce that tension.

Don't tense muscles other than the specific group at each step.

Don't hold your breath, grit your teeth, or squint.

Breathe slowly and evenly and think only about the tension-relaxation contrast.

Each tensing is for 8 to 10 seconds; each relaxing is for 10 to 15 seconds. Count "1,000 2,000..." until you have a feel for the time span.

NOTE: Each step is really two steps – one cycle of tension, two cycle of relaxation for each set of opposing muscles.

Do the entire sequence once a day until you feel you are able to control your muscle tensions.

- ! Hands: The fists are tensed; relaxed. The fingers are extended; relaxed.
- ! Biceps and triceps: The biceps are tensed (make a muscle – but shake your hands to make sure not tensing them into a fist); relaxed (drop your arm to the chair). The triceps are tensed (try to bend your arms the wrong way); relaxed (drop them).
- ! Shoulders: Pull them back (careful with this one); relax them. Push the shoulders forward (hunch); relax.
- ! Neck (lateral): With the shoulders straight and relaxed, the head is turned slowly to the right, as far as you can; relax. Turn to the left; relax.
- ! Neck (forward): Dig your chin into your chest; relax. (NB: Bringing the head back is not recommended – you could break your neck)
- ! Mouth: The mouth is opened as far as possible; relaxed. The lips are brought together or pursed as tightly as possible; relaxed.
- ! Tongue (extended and retracted): With mouth open, extend the tongue as far as possible; relax (let it sit in the bottom of your mouth). Bring it back in your throat as far as possible; relax.
- ! Tongue (roof and floor): Dig your tongue into the roof of your mouth; relax. Dig it into the bottom of your mouth; relax.
- ! Eyes: Open them as wide as possible (frown your brow); relax. Close your eyes tightly (squint); relax. Make sure you completely relax the eyes, forehead, and nose after each the tensing.
- ! Breathing: Take as deep a breath as possible – and then take a little more; let it out and breathe normally for 15 seconds. Let all the breath in your lungs out – and then a little more; inhale and breathe normally for 15 seconds.
- ! Back: With shoulders resting on the back of the chair, push your body forward so that your back is arched; relax. (NB: Be very careful with this one, or don't do it at all.)
- ! Butt: Tense the butt tightly and raise pelvis slightly off chair; relax. Dig buttocks into chair; relax.
- ! Thighs: Extend legs and raise them about 15 centimetres (6 inches) off the floor or the foot rest but don't tense the stomach, relax. Dig your feet (heels) into the floor or foot rest; relax.
- ! Stomach: Pull in the stomach as far as possible; relax completely. Push out the stomach or tense it as if you were preparing for a punch in the gut; relax.
- ! Calves and feet: Point the toes (without raising the legs); relax. Point the feet up as far as possible (beware of cramps – if you get them or feel them coming on, shake them loose); relax.
- ! Toes: With legs relaxed, dig your toes into the floor; relax. Bend the toes up as far as possible; relax.
- ! Now just relax for a while.

As the days of practice progress, you may wish to skip the steps that do not appear to be a problem for you. After you've become an expert on your tension areas (after a few weeks), you can concern yourself only with those. These exercises will not eliminate tension, but when it arises, you will know it immediately, and you will be able to "tense-relax" it away or even simply wish it away.

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