



MUSCLE RELAXATION

Our bodies respond to stressful situations by becoming tense, this is a normal evolutionary response to either prepare us to fight or defend ourselves in threatening times. However, this stress is now abstract, and whilst the physical response is no longer always helpful, we still carry this tension, even if we think we are not in a stressful situation anymore.

Progressive muscle relaxation is a simple but very effective relaxation technique you can learn to help alleviate tension and stress. In this exercise, each muscle group is tensed, this tension is then held for a moment before being released. This relaxes the muscles and can help you identify the difference between being tensed and relaxed.

It may be helpful to create a picture in your mind of the tension building up and then flowing out of your muscles. The majority of people find that it is best for them to hold the tension in their muscles for between 5 and 10 seconds and you can repeat tensing specific muscles if you feel you need to. If you feel any pain or discomfort when you target a specific muscle group, feel free to leave that step out – you should feel as comfortable as possible at all times.

Getting started: Make sure you are sitting in a chair or lying down in a position that is comfortable for you. A quiet environment is likely help with this exercise so that you can focus fully on yourself.

Exercise: Bring your attention to different parts of your body, one after the other. Go through the sequence at least twice for each body part.

1. **Tense:** As you breathe in, tense that body part
2. **Hold:** Hold your breath and the tension for a few moments
3. **Relax:** Slowly let the tension go as you breathe out

Recommended Sequence

1. Toes and feet – curl your toes down
2. Calves – turn your toes upwards towards your knees
3. Thighs – stretch your legs out fully
4. Buttocks – clench your buttocks
5. Stomach – try to pull your belly button to your spine
6. Back – arch your body forward
7. Shoulders & neck – lift shoulders up together
8. Face – scrunch your face together

