

## **Progressive Muscle Relaxation FAQs**

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is another tool that is effective in helping people relax.

- This tool is one that you may need to practice a few times before it works for you.
- In progressive muscle relaxation, you slowly tense and relax all the muscles in your body starting with your arms and moving upward through your body, letting all the tension and stress leave your body until you are completely relaxed.
- This exercise provides a deeper state of relaxation by adding a method of directly relaxing muscles throughout your body to your current breathing skills.
- This is done by initially tensing the muscles and then releasing that tension. Upon release, muscles “rebound” to a more relaxed state than prior to the tension. You have probably done this without realizing it. For example, when someone’s shoulders feel tense they will often pull their shoulder blades back for a few moments and then release them with the result of reduced tension in their shoulders. This technique employs the principle to relax large muscle groups across your entire body to produce a general state of relaxation.
- You will only tense your muscles a third or a half of the maximum tension. The tension should NOT cause pain.

### **How to do the progressive muscle relaxation exercise:**

1. Find a comfortable position in a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.
2. Take a few deep, quieting breaths. Focus on your breathing. If worrisome thoughts come into your mind, gently push them aside.
3. Now focus your attention on your feet and legs. Build up a non-painful level of tension in your legs, by flexing your feet and pointing your toes toward your upper body. Feel the tension as it spreads through your feet and legs. Focus on it. Hold the tension for about 10 seconds... then release. Let your feet and legs relax completely. Visualize the tension draining from your legs.
4. Now build up the tension in your belly by pulling your belly in toward your spine very tight. Feel the tension as it spreads through your belly. Focus on it. Hold the tension for about 10 seconds... then release. Let your belly go...let it go further and further until it is completely relaxed. Visualize the tension draining from your abdomen.
5. Move up to your shoulders. Build up the tension in your neck and shoulders by pulling them up toward your ears while tensing the muscles around your neck. Feel the tension in your shoulders radiating down into your back and up into your neck and the top of your back. Notice the sensations of pulling, of discomfort, of tightness. Hold the tension for about 10 seconds... then release. Let your shoulders droop down and let your neck relax completely. Visualize the tension draining from your neck and shoulders.
6. Now build up the tension around your mouth, jaw and throat by clenching your teeth and forcing the corners of your mouth back into a forced smile. Hold that pose, hold the tension and focus on it. Hold the tension for about 10 seconds...then release, letting your mouth drop open and the muscles around your throat and jaw relax. Visualize the tension draining from your jaw and mouth.
7. Finally, build up the tension around your forehead by raising your eyebrows as high as you can while keeping your eyes closed. Feel the wrinkling and pulling sensations across your forehead and the top of your head. Hold the tension for about 10 seconds...then release, letting your eyebrows rest down and noticing the tension disappear from around your forehead. Visualize the tension draining from your forehead.
8. Take a few more slow, quiet breaths while you visualize the tension draining from your body.