

## What is Progressive Muscle Relaxation?

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is a mindfulness exercise that is intended to help you slow down, to develop greater awareness of tension in your body and to help you let that tension go. This exercise is useful for relaxing stiff, tired, or overworked muscles and for general relaxation. Many people don't know that their muscles have become increasingly tense, and some people who are under a lot of stress may not even recognize what being relaxed feels like.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation teaches your body to distinguish between tense and relaxed sensations by purposefully tensing and releasing muscles in a systematic way, starting at the feet and working your way up to your head.



## How do I practice Progressive Muscle Relaxation?

Set aside 15 minutes in a quiet place where you can sit or lay down comfortably.

### Step 1: Tension

The first step is to apply muscle tension to a specific part of the body. Focus on one muscle group. For example, your right foot. Next, take a slow, deep breath and squeeze the muscles as hard as you can for about 5 seconds.

## **Step 2: Releasing the Tension**

Quickly release the tension, letting the tightness flow out. Exhale as you do this step.

**Important:** Very deliberately focus on the difference between the tension and relaxation. Remain relaxed in this state for about 15 seconds and then move on to the next muscle group.

### **What are the different muscle groups?**

- Foot (curl your toes downward)
- Lower leg and foot (tighten your calf muscle by pulling toes towards you)
- Entire leg (squeeze the muscles while doing above)

### **Repeat on other side of body**

- Hand (squeeze your fist into a tight ball)
- Entire right arm (tighten your forearm up towards your shoulder)

### **Repeat on other side of body**

- Butt
- Stomach
- Chest (tighten by taking a deep breath)
- Neck and shoulders (raise your shoulders up to your ears)
- Mouth (open wide enough to stretch the hinges of your jaw)
- Eyes (close tightly shut)
- Forehead (raise eyebrows as far as you can)

**Note:** It is important to really **feel** the tension. Your muscles will shake when you do this properly. Be careful not to hurt yourself! Tension should be done gently but deliberately.

## **Is there also guided Progressive Muscle Relaxation?**

Yes, it can be helpful to listen to someone guiding you through these steps. There are many audio recordings available online, on the App Store or Google Play, or on podcasts for free. You may try searching for “Progressive Relaxation” on YouTube to find a recording you like.

### **For more information:**

- University of Michigan Depression Center
- 1-800-475-MICH or 734-936-4400
- <http://www.depressioncenter.org/toolkit>

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