



Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

People under stress commonly hold muscles at high tension without even noticing it; chronically overworked muscles become sore and inflamed as a result. Learning to control your muscles' state of resting tension is a great way to reduce stress, and even ease your way into sleep without use of medication.

But just "relaxing" all your muscles at once can seem impossible. The most effective way of relaxation involves focusing on each muscle group separately, one at a time - Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). The aim is to tense the muscle group first (to focus your mind on the muscle group to be relaxed), then relax it. Visualizing the tension leaving the relaxed muscle can enhance your relaxation.

- First: Find a comfortable place to relax with all your muscles at gravity: lying on a bed, sitting in a chair with a high padded back for your head or lying on a carpeted floor will all do. Before starting, make a mental note of how tense your muscles feel.
- Start with your left hand. Clench it tightly for a count of four. Release your fist slowly to a count of 4. Breathe deeply and slowly while you tighten and release. Compare the feeling in your left hand to your right hand; notice the difference.
- Now tense your right hand for a count of four, then release for a count of four. Remember to breathe deeply and slowly, as you learned in the relaxation breathing exercise.
- Now move to your forearms, first tensing and releasing the left forearm (remember the four count), then a pause to compare the difference, then repeat with the right forearm.
- Next, apply the same process to your upper arms - first left, then a pause, then right. Keep breathing deeply and slowly.
- Your shoulders and neck are next. Shrug your shoulders to a four count, and then relax. Work your neck by pressing your head back hard (four count) and relax, then chin to your chest (four count) and relax.
- Your face is next. Wrinkle your forehead into a deep frown (four count) then relax. Close your eyes tightly (four count) and relax. Grin as wide as you can (four count) and relax. Purse your lips tightly (think lemons) and relax. Remember to take slow, deep breaths
- Next is your upper body. Stretch your chest muscles by taking a full breath, holding for four, the exhaling. Arch your back tightly (four count); relax. Suck your gut in tightly (four count) then relax.
- Next are the hips and buttocks. Press those buns together tightly for a count of four, then relax. Lastly, work on your legs - first thighs, then lower legs, then feet and toes. As you did with your arms,

With each group tighten and relax on the left, pause to note the difference, and then do the same on the right. Pause for a moment and note the difference in how your muscles feel, compared to before the exercise.