

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

an Antidote for Stress



Stress can occur quite suddenly or build up over a prolonged period of time. Whichever way it happens, muscles of the body become tensed in a way that adds to the overall feeling of stress. People often talk about “feeling tense” and also of having “aches and pains” throughout various locations in their bodies. This is particularly true of those individuals who do not readily express their emotions and store up stress in their bodies. Managing stress through a progressive muscle relaxation technique, that involves the tensing and relaxing of various muscle groups, is a proven and practicable way to release unwanted body tension associated with stress.

Prepare

- You can practice this technique while sitting in your chair or lying down.
- Begin by conducting a check of your body position and note how tense or relaxed you feel in the following group of muscles: ankles, feet, calves, thighs, pelvic region, back, hands, lower and upper arms, shoulders, neck, and head.
- Individuals report it is helpful to note how tense they feel before practicing the progressive relaxation and to compare this tension level to how they feel after practicing the technique. You can rate your level of tension on a scale from 1 to 10. The lower the score, the more relaxed you feel, the higher the score, the more tense you feel.

Steps to Proceed

- Step 1** Close your eyes and pay close attention to your feet, flex your toes away from your body.
- Step 2** Continue to tense, then hold, and release.
- Step 3** Pause and feel the restful sensation in your toes.
- Step 4** Repeat this procedure for your feet.
- Step 5** Curl your toes and squeeze them tight. Continue this until you feel the tension, until it is tight. Hold and let go. Now pause and feel the restful sensation in your toes. Repeat this procedure for your feet.
- Step 6** Follow the same tensing, then holding, then releasing procedure for your calves, then your thighs, then your buttocks.
- Step 7** Make a fist and squeeze, then tense your arms and hold. Notice the feelings of heaviness or warmth. Release and notice the feeling of well-being you become aware of when you release the tension. Remember to tense, hold, and then release.
- Step 8** Tense your back and neck and face muscles, one at a time. Hold each position as long as it is comfortable to do so.
- Step 9** Tense all the muscles in your body at once remembering to tense, hold and then release. This time you should really feel that growing sense of relaxation spreading through your body and notice that you are allowing yourself to completely relax.

Consult a physician when beginning any new stretching and exercise program – particularly if you have any health concerns.