

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a way of slowing down and calming down that has been a central skill in stress and anxiety reduction programs since the physician, Edmund Jacobson, developed it in the early 1920's. Your muscles have a state of muscle tension even when at rest, and when stressed the muscles tend to have a higher level of resting tension. This can be draining and fatiguing, and can make you more sensitive to becoming stressed in the future. PMR is beneficial because it will create a lower level of resting tension for your muscles.

PMR involves tensing various muscle groups and then bringing your attention to the experience of releasing the tension. This develops the skill of letting go of tension and the way we will do this is to cue the behavior of releasing the tension with the words, "let go". In time, the word, especially when coupled with the abdominal breathing, will become associated with the sensations of tension release and will make it more automatic for you. You will do this in stages, moving eventually towards the time when the words "let go" triggers the experience of calming down. Once this is mastered, then letting go/release can become part of the process of abdominal breathing and you only need to practice progressive muscle relaxation on an occasional basis in order to keep the association strong.

Some things to keep in mind when you do PMR are:

- you inhale and hold your breath while holding the tension.
- you exhale when you release the tension, saying to yourself "let go" each time you exhale (you can choose another word if you prefer, like "calm" or "relax", as long as you are consistent).
- take a deep breath between each tension/release phase.

Stage 1 of PMR:

Here is a script you can follow if you would prefer that to the audio recording you were given:

Make yourself as comfortable as possible lying down. You can do this on a bed or on the floor. If you have a watch on, or glasses, you may be more comfortable if you remove them. It can help to have a small towel rolled up under your neck to help support the head. Lie with your feet apart by a foot or so, and your arms out from the sides of your body by about 6 to 12 inches.

Gently close your eyes so that you can focus on the sensations you will be experiencing. Try to keep your attention only on your body. If your mind begins to wander, just notice that and gently bring your attention back to the muscle group you are working on.

Start by taking a few deep breaths. Breathe in deeply through your nose, letting your abdomen rise as you do so....then breathe out. Again, breathe in through your nose and exhale... Do that once more....

You will now tense the muscles in your face by scrunching up your face—make your face into a tight knot ... feel the tension...take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three...and now exhale, saying the word "let go" to yourself...and releasing the muscles of your face. As you let loose the tension, notice the sensations. Notice the difference between the tensed muscles and the feelings that you get when you let go of that tension. Feel the tension flow out of your muscles as your release it.

Take a deep breath...in through the nose...and exhale...

Next, tighten the muscles in your shoulders by raising your shoulders towards your ears...raising them as high as you can..... notice the strain ...take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale, again saying the word "let go" to yourself... dropping your shoulders and letting them be loose. Once again notice the feelings that are there.

Take another deep breath...in...and exhale...

Now tense up the muscles in your back by squeezing your shoulder blades together and arching your back slightly...keep your shoulder blades squeezed together and feel the stress in your muscles... take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale... loosening your back muscles, letting your arms and shoulders go limp... unleashing the tension. Notice the feeling you get upon releasing the muscle strain....

Deep breath...in...and exhale...

Next, tighten the muscles in your chest by taking a deep breath and holding it in, notice the feeling of pressure... hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale, saying the word "let go" to yourself... relaxing your chest... clearing out the tension...feeling whatever sensations arise....

Take another deep breath...in...and exhale...

Tense up the muscles now in your right hand by making a tight fist with your right hand...feel the stress... take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale..."let go"... unclenching your hand...allowing the muscles to loosen and letting go of the tension...be aware of the absence of tension there...

Take another deep breath...in...and exhale...

OK, now do the same on the left side by tensing up the muscles in your left hand...make a tight fist ...feel the tension... take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale... relaxing your hand...notice the sensations as you allow your muscles to soften and be loose.

Take a deep breath...in...and exhale...

Now tighten up the muscles in your right arm by raising your arm about an inch off the floor and stretching it down towards your knee with your wrist bent and your palm at a right angle to the floor, as if you were pushing some object down towards your knee...feel the strain... take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale ..."let go"..... letting your arm drop... your arm and wrist going limp...the muscles loosening.... becoming aware of the sensations that come from letting go.

Another deep breath...in...and exhale...

Do the same with the left arm...tense up the muscles in your left arm by raising your arm about an inch off the floor and stretching it down towards your knee with your palm up ...feel the tension... take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale..."let go"... dropping your arm and relaxing your arm and wrist...letting the muscles be loose...

Deep breath...in...and exhale...

Now you are going to tense up your abdominal muscles...press your navel towards your spine and tighten your abdominal muscles...allow the tension build...take a deep breath and hold the tension in your stomach for one...two...three... and now exhale...letting your stomach loosen... and releasing the tension. Focus on the sensations when you let go...

Take another deep breath...in...and exhale...

Next you will tighten up the muscles in your buttocks by squeezing them together...squeeze the buttock muscles together ...take a deep breath and hold the tension there for one...two...three... and now exhale..."let go"... letting your hips and legs rest easily....

Deep breath...in...and exhale...

Now tense up your knees and thigh muscles...squeeze your legs and knees together tightly...as if you were holding a penny between your knees...take a deep breath and hold the tension there for one...two...three... and now exhale ... letting your legs be loose and relax into the floor... letting go of the tension...

Another deep breath...in...and exhale...

Tighten up the muscles in your right calf by pointing the toes in your right foot towards your knee...feel the strain as your calf muscles tighten... take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale, saying the word "let go" to yourself...allowing your foot to relax...loosen the muscles and release the pressure...

Take another deep breath...in...and exhale...

Now, repeat this on the left side by tensing the muscles in your left calf by pointing the toes in your left foot towards your knee ... feel the tension as your calf muscles tighten... take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale..."let go"...the muscles softening and loosening...feelings of ease.

Take a deep breath...in...and exhale...

Next, I want you to tighten up the muscles in your right foot by curling your toes down...feel the strain in your foot and allow it to build...take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale...letting your toes be loose and releasing the tension...

A deep breath...in...and exhale...

OK, repeat this on the left side... tense up the muscles in your left foot by curling your toes down...feel the tension in your foot and allow it to grow...take a deep breath and hold that for one...two...three... and now exhale, saying the word "let go" to yourself... relaxing your toes and your foot...allowing the muscles to be loose...being aware of sensations of ease.

Take another deep breath...in...and exhale...

To finish, be aware of the sensation of relaxation as it flows from the top of your head....over your face....down the back of your neck and shoulders....down your body through your arms and hands....over your chest and abdomen...flowing through your hips and thighs...through your knees and calves...and finally into your ankles and feet.

Breathe easily for several minutes....allowing the feelings of relaxation to deepen...letting your muscles be comfortable...loose...at ease...See if you can lie there and completely surrender to gravity...letting go of any strain or tension...

Gradually become aware of your surroundings....the sounds in the room and outside of the room...the feeling of the floor underneath you...and slowly open your eyes, feeling peaceful and calm.

Stage 2 of PMR:

The next stage of PMR is to tighten then release the following muscle groups all at once, using the same instructions as above:

1. Face and shoulders
2. Back, chest, both hands, both arms (fists clenched rather than palms up).
3. Abdomen and buttocks
4. Knees/thighs, both calves, both feet

Stage 3 of PMR:

Same sequence of muscle groups in stage 1, only there is no tensing of muscles. Just focus on the muscles and relax/release the tension there.

Stage 4 of PMR:

Same sequence of muscle groups in stage 2, but done in the same way as stage 3. There is no tensing of muscles. Just focus on the muscles and relax/release the tension there.

Stage 5 of PMR:

You focus on breathing out, saying your word cue and imagery cue, and allow your muscles to relax.