

Muscle Relaxation

Guidelines for practicing muscle relaxation:

1. Practice at least twenty minutes per day. Once a day is mandatory for obtaining generalization effects.
2. Find a quiet location to practice where you won't be distracted.
3. Practice at regular times. On awakening, before bed, or before a meal is generally the best time.
4. Practice on an empty stomach.
5. Assume a comfortable position. Your entire body, including your head, should be supported. Lying down on a sofa or bed and sitting in a reclining chair are two ways of supporting your body most completely.
6. Loosen any tight garments and take off your shoes, watch, glasses, jewelry, and so on.
7. Make a decision not to worry about anything. Give yourself permission to put aside the concerns of the day.
8. **Consult your doctor before tensing muscles (in progressive muscle relaxation) that have a history of injury.**
9. Assume a passive, detached attitude. You want to adopt a "let it happen" attitude and be free of any worry about how well you are performing the technique. Do not try to relax. Do not try to control your body. Do not judge your performance. The point is to let go and "just be".

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (approx. 20 minutes)

(taken from "The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook" by E. Bourne)

*When you tense a particular muscle group, do so vigorously, without straining, for seven to ten seconds. Concentrate on what is happening. Feel the buildup of tension in each particular muscle group. When you release the muscles, do so abruptly, and then relax, enjoying the sudden feeling of limpness. Allow the relaxation to develop for at least fifteen to twenty seconds before going on to the next group of muscles.

Once you are seated comfortably supported in a quiet place, follow the detailed instructions below:

1. Take 3 deep abdominal breaths, exhaling slowly each time. As you exhale, imagine the tension throughout your body flowing away.
2. Clench your fists. Hold for seven to ten seconds and then release for fifteen to twenty seconds. *Use these same time intervals for all muscle groups.*
3. Tighten your biceps by drawing your forearms up toward your shoulders and making a muscle with both arms. Hold... and then relax.

4. Tighten your triceps by extending your arms out straight and locking your elbows. Hold... and then relax.
5. Tense the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as far as you can. Hold... and then relax. Imagine your forehead muscles becoming smooth and limp as they relax.
6. Tense the muscles around your eyes by clenching your eyelids tightly shut. Hold... and then relax. Imagine sensations of deep relaxation spreading all around the area of your eyes.
7. Tighten your jaw by opening your mouth so widely that you stretch the muscles around the hinges of your jaw. Hold... and then relax. Let your lips part and allow your jaw to hang loose.
8. Tighten the muscles in the back of your neck by pulling your head back as if you were going to touch your head to your back (be gentle with this muscle group to avoid injury). Focus only on tensing the muscles in your neck. Hold... and then relax.
9. Take a few deep breaths and tune in to the weight of your head sinking into whatever surface it is resting on.
10. Tighten your shoulders by raising them up as if they were going to touch your ears. Hold... and then relax.
11. Tighten the muscles around your shoulder blades by pushing your shoulder blades back as if you were going to touch them together. Hold the tension in your shoulder blades...and then relax.
12. Tighten the muscles in your chest by taking in a deep breath. Hold for up to ten seconds...and then release slowly. Imagine any excess tension in your chest flowing away with the exhalation.
13. Tighten your stomach muscles by sucking your stomach in. Hold...and then release. Imagine a wave of relaxation spreading through your abdomen.
14. Tighten your lower back by arching it up (Omit this exercise if you have lower back pain.) Hold... and then relax.
15. Tighten your buttocks by pulling them together. Hold...and then relax. Imagine the muscles in your hips going loose and limp.
16. Squeeze the muscles in your thighs all the way down to your knees. Hold... and then relax. Feel your thigh muscles smoothing out and relaxing completely.
17. Tighten your calf muscles by pulling your toes toward you (flex carefully to avoid cramps). Hold... and then relax.
18. Tighten your feet by curling your toes downward. Hold... and then relax.
19. Mentally scan your body for any residual tension. If a particular area remains tense repeat one or two tense-relax cycles for that group of muscles.

20. Now imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading throughout your body, start at your head and gradually penetrating every muscle group all the way down your toes.
21. When you feel that you have released the tension in all of your muscles take a few deep breaths and turn to your side (if laying down). Get up slowly.

Passive Muscle Relaxation (20 + minutes)

(taken from “The Anxiety and Phobia Workbook” by E. Bourne)

Generally it is best to assume a laying position for passive muscle relaxation. The idea behind passive muscle relaxation is to focus on each muscle group in sequence – from feet to head – and imagine each group relaxing. The following script will lead you through a passive muscle relaxation exercise.

Begin by taking two or three deep, abdominal breaths and let yourself settle back into the chair, bed, or wherever you happen to be right now. Make yourself fully comfortable. Let this be a time just for yourself, putting aside all worries and concerns of the day and making this a time just for you.

Let each part of your body begin to relax, starting with your feet. Just imagine your feet letting go and relaxing right now. Let go of any excess tension in your feet. Just imagine the tension draining away.

As your feet are relaxing, imagine relaxation moving up into your calves. Let the muscles in your calves unwind and loosen up and let go. Allow any tension you’re feeling in your calves to just drain away easily and quickly.

Now as your calves are relaxing, allow relaxation to move up into your thighs. Let the muscles in your thighs unwind and smooth out and relax completely. You might begin to feel your legs from your waist down to your feet becoming more and more relaxed. You might notice your legs becoming heavy as they relax more and more.

Continue now and let relaxation move into your hips. Feel any excess tension in your hips dissolve and flow away.

Soon you might allow relaxation to move into your stomach area. Just let go of any stress in your stomach area – let it all go right now, imagining deep sensations of relaxation spreading all around your abdomen.

As your stomach is relaxing, continue to allow relaxation to move up into your chest. All the muscles in your chest can unwind and loosen up and let go. Each time you exhale, imagine breathing away any remaining tension in your chest until your chest feels

completely relaxed. Let the relaxation deepen and develop throughout your chest, stomach area, and your legs.

Soon you might allow relaxation to move into your shoulders – just letting deep sensations of calmness and relaxation spread all through the muscles of your shoulders. Let your shoulders drop, allowing them to feel completely relaxed. Now allow the relaxation in your shoulders to move down into your arms, spreading into your upper arms, down into your elbows and forearms, and finally all the way down to your wrists and hands. Let your arms relax, enjoying the good feeling of relaxation in your arms.

Put aside any worries, any uncomfortable, unpleasant thoughts right now. Let yourself be totally in the present moment as you let yourself relax more and more.

You can feel relaxation moving into your neck now. All the muscles in your neck just unwind, smooth out, and relax completely. Just imagine the muscles in your neck loosening up just like a knotted cord unraveling.

Then soon, the relaxation can move into your chin and jaw. Allow your jaw to relax, letting your jaw loosen up. As they are relaxing, imagine relaxation moving into the area around your eyes. Any tension around your eyes can just dissipate and flow away as you allow your eyes to relax completely. Any eyestrain just dissolves now and your eyes can fully relax. Now let your forehead relax too – let the muscles in your forehead smooth out and relax completely, noticing the weight of your head against whatever it's resting on as you allow your entire head to relax completely.

Just enjoy the good feeling of relaxation all over now – letting yourself drift deeper and deeper into quietness and peace – getting more and more in touch with the place deep inside of perfect peace and serenity.