

## PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION EXERCISE

Ideally, progressive relaxation should be practiced in a chair with a high back to support your neck and head, and with feet well supported. Or while lie in bed, with one pillow under your head, and two pillows under your knees. It is important to have a relaxed, almost passive attitude towards the exercises. Do not approach these as if you were an athlete in training. Select a quiet room free from distractions. Remove shoes and loosen ties and belts. Avoid doing the program immediately after eating.

Each muscle group is tensed from 5-7 seconds, and then relaxed for 20 – 30 seconds, and the procedure is then repeated. If an area remains tense, you can practice up to 5 times. However avoid tensing too hard, to avoid pain or cramping. You should feel no discomfort. Any area that has been injured or is prone to injury should be tightened gently.

While doing the exercises, you should not hold your breath. Try to time the release of tension for the muscle group you are tightening to coincide with an exhalation or “out” breath. Try to imagine that you are “breathing out the tension”. Also, when you are releasing the tension, let those muscles relax completely and immediately.

### A) THE TRAINING SEQUENCE

1. Right Arm: Put your arm and hand in a relaxed, supported position and make a fist, tensing your upper arm as if you were going to lift a heavy bucket, but do not move the arm. Do this 2 times.
2. Left Arm: As for right arm. Do this 2 times.
3. Forehead: Lift your eyebrows high as if you wanted them to touch the top of your head. (Another method is to frown, or “knit your brows”.) Do this 2 times.
4. Eyes, Cheeks, and Nose: Close your eyes tightly and wrinkle your nose. Do this 2 times.
5. Jaws, Lips, and Tongue: Clench your teeth, press your lips together, and push your tongue up onto the roof of your mouth. Do this 2 times.
6. Neck and Throat: Pull your chin down as if trying to touch it to your chest, but at the same time prevents it from actually touching your chest. (Another method, if you are lying, is to press your head back into the pillow). Do this 2 times.
7. Chest, Back and Shoulders: Take a deep breath, hold it, (this is the only time you hold your breath) then press your shoulder blades towards each other while at the same time tightening the chest muscles. Do this 2 times.
8. Abdomen and Buttocks: Make your stomach hard (or pull your stomach in and hold it, or push your stomach out). Clench your buttocks together. Do this 2 times.
9. Right Leg: Tighten the thigh, calf and foot muscles. To do this, imagine that you are lifting your lower leg with your upper leg but do not allow it to move, press your heel down into the floor and pull your toes upward toward your head. Do this 2 times.
10. Left Leg: As for right leg. Do this 2 times.

Once you have worked through the entire program try to set aside enough time to allow you to lie quietly in the relaxed state for 15-20 minutes.

## **B) DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION DRILL**

Practice this drill twice daily; fifteen to twenty minutes is ideal (but even three minutes is better than nothing when circumstances do not permit a longer session). Practice before meals or no sooner than one hour after meals. You can also practice before an anticipated stress experience but no more frequently than four times a day.

1. Find as quiet an environment as possible. Lie on your back in a comfortable position or sit comfortably. Close your eyes.
2. For right-handed people, begin by physically tensing the right hand for an instant, then relax and let it go loose. Tell it to be heavy and warm. Continue with the rest of the right side of the body, moving up to forearm, upper arm, shoulder, then down to the foot, lower leg, and upper leg. Next, follow the same procedure on the left side of the body. (If you are left-handed, begin the procedure with the left hand and continue.) The hands, arms, and legs are now relaxed, heavy and warm. Wait for these feelings. (After mastering the technique, you will not need to tense the muscles before relaxing them.)
3. Next, relax the muscles of the hips and let a wave of relaxation pass up from the abdomen to the chest. Do not tense these muscles. Tell them to be heavy and warm. Your breathing will come more from the diaphragm and will be slower. Wait for this breathing change.
4. Now let the wave of relaxation continue into the shoulders, neck, jaw and the muscles of the face. Pay special attention to the muscles controlling the eyes and forehead.

## **C) MENTAL RELAXATION DRILL**

After entering a state of deep muscle relaxation, you are ready to begin the mind-clearing process that deepens the relaxation state. Your eyes are closed and your forehead is cool.

1. Enter a passive state; let thoughts flow through your head.
2. If thoughts recur, respond by saying "no" under your breath.
3. Imagine a calm blue sky or sea or any blue area or object without detail (with your eyes closed). Try to see the color blue (which has been found to be a particularly relaxing colour).
4. Become aware of your slow, natural breathing. Follow each breath as you inhale and exhale.
5. If you still do not feel calm and restful, you may find it helpful to use a repeated, soothing word (such as "love" or "God") or less symbolic word (such as "now" or "breath"). If you find that using a word distracts you, try using a sound (such as "ah"). Think of the word or sound silently, preferably during exhalation. Always remind yourself to keep the muscles of the face, eyes, and forehead loose and to keep your forehead cool.

The Deep Muscle Relaxation and Mental Relaxation drills are interactive and should ordinarily be done together. Once you have learned both drills, simply combine them. Practice this combined Deep Muscle/Mental Relaxation Drill twice daily.