

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves tensing specific muscle groups and then relaxing them. It is termed “progressive” because you relax all major muscle groups - starting at the head and working your way down to your feet - relaxing them one at a time. In only 10 to 15 minutes you can achieve total body relaxation.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is a particularly effective relaxation technique, because it places your focus on your body tension. There are many other relaxation techniques that can help you reduce your anxiety, but this technique may be most helpful for people who have body complaints that often accompany high levels of stress and anxiety, such as headaches, stomach problems, or muscle pain. When you are ready to try this technique, find a place where you won't be disturbed or distracted for at least 15 minutes. Recline in a comfortable chair or on a mat and take a few deep breaths to begin the exercise. Use the following audio to help you learn this technique. This audio was recorded at the McKinley Health Center at the University of Illinois and will guide you through your progressive relaxation. You can follow the link and play the audio right from your computer. Time: 12 minutes

http://www.mckinley.illinois.edu/units/health_ed/stress_audio/PMR%20Head%20to%20toe.mp3

You can also download the audio to your computer as an mp3 file by right clicking on the screen and selecting “save as.” You can then attach your smart phone or music player to your computer and copy it to a playlist. After listening for a few times, you can practice this relaxation technique without the audio if you wish, but remember to relax for at least 10 minutes.

Relaxation techniques can be very effective in reducing anxiety, but only when you practice these techniques regularly. When you practice relaxation techniques for at least 10 minutes a day, you will train your brain and body to “calm down” on demand. As soon as you start to feel anxious, you can take a few deep breaths and think about how it feels to be calm, and this automatically will send a message to your brain to “calm down,” and your body to release your muscle tension.

Taking 10 minutes a day to practice relaxation techniques will not only help you control your anxiety, but may also have other health benefits. There are many different kinds of relaxation techniques, and they all appear to have the same healthful effect on the mind and body. Some research suggests that relaxation techniques can aid the body in the healing process, help in controlling high blood pressure, coping with chronic pain, controlling asthma, and aiding with sleep problems. Many medical professionals all believe that daily relaxation exercises will aid in preventing disease, reducing elevated levels of cortisol (the stress hormone), and bolstering the immune system.

Use the chart on the next page to help you create a habit of relaxing every day.

Relaxation Worksheet

Use the chart below to record your daily relaxation "habit." Make copies of this chart and keep recording the time you spend relaxing until it is truly a habit, something you do without thinking, like brushing your teeth.

Date: _____

| | Time of Day | Minutes | Mood Before | Mood After |
|-----------|-------------|---------|-------------|------------|
| SUNDAY | | | | |
| MONDAY | | | | |
| TUESDAY | | | | |
| WEDNESDAY | | | | |
| THURSDAY | | | | |
| FRIDAY | | | | |
| SATURDAY | | | | |