

Progressive Relaxation:

Stress involves both a physical and mental/emotional component. Try to take advantage of the physical component, which will influence the mental/emotional component, to create an **overall feeling of ease**. Many people allow their muscles to tighten up without noticing. In this exercise, you will go through the body and deliberately tighten and then loosen different sets of muscles. The idea is to notice the contrast between how the muscle feels when it is tight, and when you relax it. By recognizing the presence of tension, you can learn to induce the opposite – **relaxation**.

Sit back and feel your spine supported by the chair. Bend your knees and place your feet on the floor. Rest your hands in your lap. Let your head drop forward toward your chest if you wish, and allow your eyelids to close gently.

Begin with the muscles in the toes of your left foot. First curl your toes as tightly as you can and hold for a few seconds. Focus your attention on what it feels like to have those muscles be as tight as you can make them. Now let go and let them relax.

Now, stretch your left leg out, lifting the foot off the floor and draw your toes toward your knee to tighten the muscles around the ankle. Hold it, notice how it feels and then relax the muscles. Notice the difference. Repeat the process on your right side—first the toes and then the ankle.

Now, squeeze your knees and ankles together and form your buttocks. Hold the contraction and then release. Allow the tension to wash away and take notice of how that feels.

Contract the abdominal muscles in the back by squeezing the shoulder blades toward each other. Feel the holding and then let go, allowing the space between the shoulder blades to soften and broaden.

Now contract the muscles around the shoulders and neck by drawing your shoulders up toward your ears, and pulling your chin in. Notice how much effort goes into creating that tension, and then let the shoulders and chin go. Feel the inner space that comes with relaxation.

Extend the left arm and make a tight fist. Again, notice the effort involved, and then after several moments, let it relax. As you once again let your arm rest on the chair arm or in your lap, allow the weight of your arm to sink into the support below. Repeat with the right arm and fist.

Pay particular attention to the facial muscles including the tongue and other muscles around the mouth. Push your tongue to the roof of your mouth to tighten it, then relax. Tense your jaw by clenching your teeth firmly together. Imagine that your jaw muscles are elastic bands being pulled tighter and tighter. As you release and relax, allow your lower jaw to drop lightly and visualize the elastic bands evaporating. Notice difference in the feeling. Lastly, close your eyes as firmly as possible and draw your brows down. Feel the hardness in the contraction and then allow the whole area behind and around the eyes and temples to soften and expand.

Sit quietly for a few minutes, focusing your awareness on your breathing. With each exhalation, let your muscles expand and relax a little more. Keep your mind alert, focusing on your breathing and the easing sensation in your body. Now, inhale deeply, start moving your fingers and toes, and then extended your hands above head and gently stretch as you slowly open your eyes.

Feel yourself re-charged, relaxed and alert.