

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

"Progressive muscle relaxation" is a technique in which the major muscle groups in the body are alternately tensed and relaxed. The process can proceed from the head to the feet or from the feet to the head. Progressive muscle relaxation can lead to deep levels of physical and mental relaxation. The idea is to tense and then relax the muscles in the forehead, eyes, mouth, jaw, neck, shoulders, upper back, chest, biceps, forearms, hands, stomach, buttocks, groin, legs, thighs, calves, and feet. Each muscle group is tensed for 5 seconds and then relaxed for 10-15 seconds, then tensed again for 5 seconds and relaxed again for 10-15 seconds. Generally you want to choose a time to do this exercise when it is relatively quiet, and in a place where you are comfortable and unlikely to be disturbed. It will take about 15 minutes to go through all the muscle groups.

When you use progressive muscle relaxation, it is really important to notice the difference between feelings of relaxation and feelings of tension. For some people, relaxation feels heavier or warmer than feeling tense. Others experience a lighter feeling. Whatever your experience is, notice the difference so you will become better aware of tension and relaxation in your body.

Once you become more aware of your muscle tension, you can use these relaxation exercises throughout your day and particularly when you begin to feel anxious. Different people carry muscle tension in different parts of their bodies, so the particular areas that need emphasis vary from person to person. Most people report increased levels of relaxation and decreased levels of physical tension and anxiety when they do progressive muscle relaxation. Repeated practice of any relaxation method creates even deeper levels of relaxation. Relaxation is a skill that can be developed, much like playing the piano or throwing a ball: The more you practice, the greater your development of the skill will be.