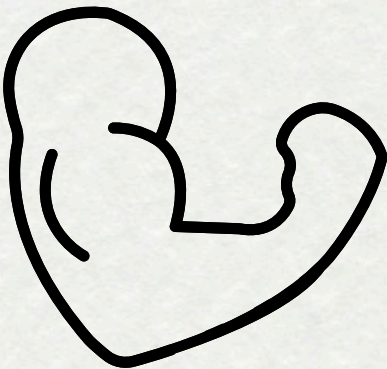


MENTAL HEALTH

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Progressive muscle relaxation is a method that can help alleviate tension in your body. This technique involves a combination of muscle effort and simultaneous breathing. When you inhale, you need to contract a muscle group for a period of time, followed by an exhalation where you should completely relax the muscle group. When your body is physically relaxed, you are less likely to feel anxious.



Progressive muscle relaxation techniques are easy to learn. You can do them whenever you want, and you don't need any tools or special equipment. Review the muscle groups table below before starting. There, you'll learn what actions to perform to contract each muscle group. You can follow the order of the muscle groups table or work on the muscle groups you want independently.

The following instructions for Progressive Muscle Relaxation and the muscle groups table are from the organization [CIGNA](#). You can sit, lie down, or stand for this exercise.

Muscle Groups

Follow the list of muscle groups below in order. Then read about the actions you should take to tense each one.

Muscle Groups	What to do to tense the muscle group?
Hands	Squeeze your hands tightly.
Wrists and forearms	Extend arms and bend your hands back at the wrist.
Biceps and upper arms	Clench your hands into fists, bend your arms at the elbows, and flex your biceps.
Shoulders	Shrug them up to your ears.
Forehead	Make a hard frown.
Around the eyes and nose	Close your eyes as tightly as you can. (Remove contact lenses before starting the exercise).
Cheeks and jaws	Smile as widely as you can.
Around the mouth	Press your lips together tightly. (Ensure your face is not tense, just use the lips).
Neck	Press your neck back against the floor or a chair.
Front of the neck	Touch your chest with your chin. (Try not to create tension in the neck or head).
Chest	Take a deep breath and hold it for 4 to 10 seconds.
Back	Arch your back up, away from the floor or chair.
Abdomen	Suck it in tightly. (Check your chest and stomach for tension).
Hips and buttocks	Squeeze your buttocks tightly.
Thighs	Squeeze your thighs tightly.
Calves	Point your toes toward your face, then point them away and curl them down at the same time.



Instructions:

1. Inhale and tense the first muscle group for 4 to 10 seconds (strong but not to the point of pain or cramping).
2. Exhale and suddenly and completely relax the muscle group (do not relax gradually).
3. Relax for 10 to 20 seconds before continuing. Note the difference between how the muscles feel when tense and how they feel when relaxed.
4. Repeat the instructions (steps 1 to 3 above) with the next muscle group.
5. When you have finished with all muscle groups, count backward from 5 to 1 to refocus on the present.



Notice how you feel at the end of this exercise. If this exercise worked well for you, add it to your resource list to use when you are stressed.

Watch the Progressive Muscle Relaxation videos here:

Youth	Adults.
	

If you are interested in more information on different self-help coping strategies, visit our Unaccompanied Children Resource Center page: [ucresourcecenter.org](#).