



# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Persistent stress and anxiety can cause prolonged muscle tension, which, in turn, can cause discomfort, pain, headaches, irritability, and fatigue (often worsening anxiety). Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) can reduce some of these feelings.

## How To Do PMR

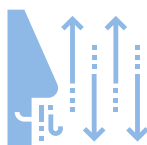
PMR involves systematically tensing and relaxing your major muscle groups, from your feet upwards. To do PMR, you can follow the outline below (it takes about 10 minutes) or listen to our audio guide here: <https://thiswayup.org.au/pmr-audio-2/>. Over time, you'll learn the sequence and won't need to keep referring to these resources.



Sit comfortably in a chair, in a quiet, private space. Rest your feet flat on the ground. You can also lie on the floor, if that's more comfortable for you. Close your eyes if that helps you relax.



Breathe in through your nose and out through your mouth, slowly and gently. Breathe with your diaphragm, rather than your upper chest (imagine your stomach filling with air as you breathe in, like a balloon).



Notice the feeling of your breath as it passes through your nose towards your stomach. On each out breath, encourage yourself to relax. You can even say 'relax' to yourself in your mind. Continue this for a few minutes.



When you're ready, shift your attention to your feet. What do they feel like? Warm, cold, tingly? Gently curl your toes under your feet. Hold for a few moments, then release and relax. Repeat and continue this for a minute or two.



Next, shift your attention to your lower legs. Gently tense your calves for a few moments, then release and relax. Breathe slowly and smoothly, and relax each time you breathe out. Repeat for your thighs, bottom, and stomach.



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Then, shift your attention to your shoulders and neck. Notice any tension or tightness in these areas. Gently tense your shoulders and hold for a few moments. As you breathe out, relax - drop your shoulders and lengthen your neck. Repeat for a minute or two.



Next, become aware of your fingers, hands, and arms. Breathe slowly and smoothly, as you pay attention to the sensations in these areas. When you're ready, tense these muscles for a few moments before gradually releasing. Breathe out, releasing any tension left in your arms for a few minutes.



Now, focus on your face and head - your lips, cheeks, eyelids, nose, forehead, and scalp. Gently screw up your nose, purse your lips, close your eyes tightly, and furrow your brow. Hold for a few moments and then, as you breathe out, relax. Notice the difference between the tense and relaxed feelings. Continue this for a few minutes.



To finish, bring your attention back to your breath. Breathe slowly and smoothly. Scan your body, from your feet to your head, looking for any sources of tension. As you breathe out, let go of any tension you find. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation throughout your whole body. When you're ready, open your eyes and bring your attention to where you are.

## PMR Tips

- Some people feel anxious about 'wasting time' when they try to relax. Remember that relaxation training is a valuable skill to learn - it will help boost your mental health and productivity.
- Practice in a quiet space where you won't be disturbed.
- Don't tense your muscles too tightly; PMR shouldn't be painful or uncomfortable.
- You can try doing PMR before bed, to help you sleep.
- Practice PMR regularly to get the most benefit.
- Don't worry if your mind wanders during the exercise, that's normal. Whenever it happens, just bring your attention back to the exercise.