

How to deal with stress: Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)



One of the most common signs of stress is muscle tension. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a way to manage that stress by teaching you to recognize and relieve this tension. It is done by contracting and then relaxing muscle groups in a set order. Concentrating on the technique also frees your mind from the problems or situations that caused the stress in the first place.

How is it done?

- Start by getting into a comfortable position and do a few minutes of deep breathing.
- Next, tighten the muscle group for 5 to 10 seconds. Then, quickly release the tension and relax the muscles for 15 to 30 seconds.
- Note the difference in the two feelings.
- You will be working on tensing and relaxing muscle groups in a special order. Some people start at the feet and work up while others start at the head and work down. Do what feels best to you. Try this order:
 - Right foot, Right lower leg and foot, Entire right leg
 - Left foot, Left lower leg and foot, Entire left leg
 - Right hand, Right forearm and hand, Entire right arm
 - Left hand, Left forearm and hand, Entire left arm
 - Face
 - Neck and shoulders
 - Stomach
- End the session by taking a few minutes to relax, deep breathe and enjoy yourself. Open your eyes and do a few stretches. Wiggle your toes and fingers. You should feel refreshed!



There are many ways to do PMR. There are also many books and tapes about the technique that you may want to explore. The best way to learn PMR is to practice it often! Plan to do PMR each morning and night. Each session takes about 10 to 15 minutes.



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Some other helpful hints:

- It is best to do PMR before eating. Also avoid smoking and drinking.
- Find a quiet place to do PMR without music or interruptions.
- Keep the lights low.
- Wear loose clothing and take off your shoes.
- Do not hold your breath during the exercises. Get into the habit of breathing in while you tense a muscle and breathing out while you release the tension.
- Here are a few tips on how to tense your muscles: To tense your hand, make a fist. To tense your facial muscles, squeeze your eyes shut. You can also clench your teeth and pull back the corners of your mouth. Shrug up your shoulders and pull them into your neck to tense that muscle group.
- Use PMR to fall asleep at night.
- As you perfect your technique, you will learn how to recognize the feeling of tension and stress building in your muscles and then be able to quickly release it on command.

PMR can cause an increase in blood pressure. You should not do PMR without first talking with your healthcare provider if you have these problems:

- heart disease
- high blood pressure
- serious injuries
- muscle spasms
- back problems

Choose wisely, *Choose* HEALTH!

To learn more ways to deal with stress call
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