

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Our bodies respond automatically to stressful situations and thoughts by becoming tense. The opposite relationship also works: a good way of relaxing the mind is to deliberately relax the body. In a progressive muscle relaxation, as you take a gentle breathe in, each muscle group is tensed in turn, and the tension is then released as you breathe out. This relaxes the muscles and allows you to notice the contrast between tension and relaxation. Relaxation should be enjoyable so if any part of the exercise is too difficult skip it for the moment. If you have any injuries, you may wish to leave out that part of the exercise.

Preparation

Sit-down on a couch, or on a chair. Support your head and neck with a pillow or cushion if this makes you feel more comfortable. Close your eyes if you are comfortable doing so.

Instructions

Focus your attention on different parts of your body in sequence. Go through the sequence three times.

Actions:

Neck & upper back: Shrug your shoulders upwards and then stick your chest out, then relax your muscles by lowering your shoulders slowly.

Chest and upper arms: Put your arms out as if you were giving a very large person a big hug, then relax your muscles by moving your shoulders back and lowering your arms gently with your chest proud.

Hands: Place your thumbs on the outside of your fists and make a tight fist, relax your hands by releasing your fists gently.

Face: Scrunch up the muscles in your face (not too hard) and then relax them.

Calves: Place your feet flat on the ground and then tense your calves by raising your heels, relax the muscles by lowering them gently.

Legs: Raise one foot in the air so it is straight, relax your leg by lowering it gently.

Toes: Tense your toes by scrunching them up, then relax them by returning them to their starting position.

