

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation involves slowly tensing and releasing muscle groups in the body to achieve a relaxation response. This method can be very helpful for managing stress and anxiety. The key to this method is to practice it often so that it becomes “normalized” for you. If you do it occasionally, it can induce some stress because it will feel unfamiliar and strange. CSAS recommends practicing it several times daily for the best results: during breaks from class, before bed, etc. You can then do it before exams or other stressful situations to help induce a relaxation response and calm yourself. The physiological response of the body, when this has become routine, will trigger a psychological response as well that will help you center yourself and keep calm. Follow the steps below and allow at least 15 minutes to fully complete this. If you are in a pinch for time (like before a test), you can just do a few quick muscle groups to still induce the relaxation response (such as your fists, mouth, feet). If you have physical conditions or soreness, consult with your doctor before performing these exercises (e.g., broken bones, pulled muscles).

Remember: practice makes predictable (normalized). **Progressive muscle relaxation** can help you fall asleep if you have insomnia. The more often you practice, the more likely this method will induce a relaxation response. You can add other muscle groups not listed if you feel comfortable.

Quick Tips: Do these while seated in a chair with a firm back. You will keep your back against the chair back and stay seated for the exercises. You can do these in the order below, reverse the order, or try any different order that works for you. Breathe slowly and deeply as you do the exercises. Think of really tensing your muscle groups as you tense them and then imagine stress, pain, and anxiety flowing out of you as you release the muscles. Hold the tension for about 10 or 15 seconds. Release for the same amount of time. Be cautious and don't strain yourself or overextend your muscles—create some tension that is not painful.

1. Try starting with your **neck**. Sit up straight and turn your neck slowly to the right as far as you can. Hold it for 10 seconds. Then turn it back to the front and relax for 10 seconds. Then turn your neck to the right as far as you can; hold for 10 seconds and then turn back to the front and relax for 10 seconds.
2. Move to your **shoulders**. Sit up straight and shrug your shoulders as close up to your ears as you can. Hold for 10 seconds and then relax and let them go limp for 10 seconds.
3. Try your **teeth**. Grit your teeth for 10 seconds; release and make a slight smile for 10 seconds.
4. Move to your **mouth**. Open your mouth as wide as you can for 10 seconds. Relax for 10 seconds.
5. Do it with **breathing**. Inhale slowly for 10 seconds; then let it out slowly for 10 seconds. Let yourself breathe normally for 10-15 seconds before moving to the next group.
6. Move to your **biceps** (and **triceps**). Tense and make a muscle without making a fist and hold for 10 seconds. Release for 10 seconds and let your arms hang limp at your sides for 10 seconds.
7. Move to your **hands** and make tight fists for 10 seconds; extend your fingers and relax for 10 seconds.
8. Move to your **stomach** and pull your stomach in toward you for 10 seconds. Then relax and push your stomach out as far as you can for 10 seconds.
9. Move to your **thighs/calves/feet**. Put your feet flat on the ground and push down as hard as you can (tense your glutes too) for 10 seconds. Then release and sit still without pushing for 10 seconds.
10. Do one more exercise with your **thighs/calves/feet/toes**. Extend your legs out in front of you, stretching them as far forward as you can with your back still against the chair and point your toes back toward you for 10 seconds. Release for 10 seconds.

You did it!