

Progressive Muscle Relaxation



Principle

Many people are not aware of the tension that they habitually hold in their body. As you are reading this, notice your right shoulder -- are you able to drop it a little further? Notice the small muscles in your jaw -- consciously relax them and notice the change. Our bodies need a certain degree of tension in order to get around during our daily routine, but, by increasing our awareness, we become more adept at breaking unhealthy patterns of tension and initiating relaxation.

For the progressive relaxation, we begin with large muscles because it is quite easy to see in them the difference between tension and relaxation. Tightening large muscles exaggerates the sensation of tension, while releasing these muscles makes tangible the sensation of relaxation.

Technique

1. Start with a large muscle, such as one on the arm.
 2. Raise the right arm and tighten the fist, shoulder, and muscles of the arm. Try to tense the muscles as you inhale. Hold the tension for fifteen seconds.
 3. Gradually release the tension and, exhaling, allow the arm to slacken and relax. Remain in the relaxed position for thirty seconds.
 4. Do the same movements with the left arm.
 5. Then, inhaling, shrug the right shoulder up to the right ear. Hold this contraction for fifteen seconds.
 6. Gradually release the tension as you exhale and allow the shoulder to drop. See if the right shoulder is able to drop a little further. Notice the little muscles around the shoulder and the quality of your breathing. Stay in the relaxed position for thirty seconds.
 7. Do the same movements with the left shoulder.
 8. When you finish, rest for a few minutes.
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1. Next, tighten the right leg from the right buttock to the right ankle and foot. Inhale while squeezing and tightening the entire leg as you raise it. Hold the tension for fifteen seconds.
 2. Then, exhale and gradually release the tension. Allow the leg to slacken and relax for thirty seconds.
 3. Do the same movements with the left leg.
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1. See if you can contract your abdominal muscles. Imagine that your stomach is a fist and is closing. Contract your stomach muscles by squeezing them. Hold the tension for fifteen seconds.
 2. Gradually release the tension, and allow the abdomen to soften and relax for thirty seconds.

1. You may want to experiment with some of the smaller muscles now. For instance, scrunch up your face. Make funny expressions by tightening all of the muscles in your forehead, cheeks, lips, and jaw. Hold this tension for fifteen seconds.
2. Gradually release with a long exhalation.
3. Rest for a few minutes. Become familiar with the sense of relaxation in isolated parts of your body and in your body in general. In time, the body learns to recognize tension and follow it with relaxation.

Here is a set of simple progressive muscle relaxation techniques that can be used at school or in public settings without anyone observing:

1. While sitting at a desk or in a chair, tightly clench one fist, pushing the tips of your fingers into your palm. Hold this position for at least 20 seconds.
2. Then, slowly release your fingers, paying close attention to the sense of relief and relaxation in your hand.
3. Do this with your other hand and then complete one more set.
4. Next, try to clench your feet into a ball, bending your toes downward in your shoes (or out) so that your toes are pushing against the ground or the soles of your shoes. Hold both feet in this position for at least 15 seconds.
5. Then, slowly release, experiencing the sense of relaxation and relief.
6. Next, while seated, keep both heels on the ground and raise your toes straight up, holding this posture for 15-20 seconds.
7. Drop your toes and feel the relaxation in your shin and calf areas.
8. Other simple stretches, such as squeezing your forearms against your triceps or stretching your legs straight out while pointing your toes back toward you, can easily be done while seated and can be very helpful in reducing stress.

Resources

Websites

[University of Minnesota](#)

Visit this link for a progressive muscle relaxation exercise and explore the site for other self-care and stress management strategies.

Videos

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KxQJliu9tK0&feature=related>

A 7-minute progressive muscle relaxation tutorial.