# Progressive muscle relaxation

Tensing and releasing each muscle group in turn, to learn what relaxed feels like.

Anxiety and stress leave muscles tight, often without us noticing. In this exercise you tense each muscle group on purpose, then let go, so you learn what release feels like and can find it again when you need it.

Allow about fifteen minutes. Sit or lie somewhere quiet. For each area, tense for about 5 seconds, then release for about 15 seconds and notice the difference. Tense firmly, not painfully. Skip any area that is injured or sore.

| Area | How to tense it |
|---|---|
| Hands and forearms | Make tight fists. |
| Upper arms | Bend your elbows and tense your biceps. |
| Shoulders | Lift them up towards your ears. |
| Forehead and eyes | Raise your eyebrows high, then screw your eyes shut. |
| Jaw | Press your teeth together and pull the corners of your mouth back. |
| Neck | Gently press your head back against the chair or pillow. |
| Chest and back | Take a breath in and pull your shoulder blades together. |
| Stomach | Pull your belly in tight. |
| Thighs | Press your knees together or push your heels into the floor. |
| Lower legs | Point your toes up towards your face. |
| Feet | Curl your toes under. |

## To finish

Scan through your body from head to toe. If any tightness is left, let it go. Breathe slowly for a minute or two. Get up slowly.

**Tension before**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

None Extreme

**Tension after**

0 — 1 — 2 — 3 — 4 — 5 — 6 — 7 — 8 — 9 — 10

None Extreme

*With practice, most people can relax by scanning and releasing, without needing to tense first.*

*Progressive muscle relaxation was developed by Edmund Jacobson.*

**Notes**

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