

Relaxing your body – Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Explanation: When the body is tense, the mind is too, and where the body goes, often the mind follows. Therefore, if we are feeling stressed and anxious, one solution is to work on relaxing our bodies and notice that the mind also calms down as a result. One way of doing this is a progressive muscle relaxation exercise.

How to do it: Essentially, you bring your attention to the muscles in your body – starting either with the top of your head or with your feet – and then move through the body, consciously relaxing each muscle and muscle group as you go. It's a calming process that allows you to be more in tune with your body. If you are struggling to know how to relax, tense the muscles first and then relax them, so you can feel the difference. You can just do this in your own way or use the script below if you want some direction. The practitioner or a parent/carer could read the script to help you relax or you could record it and play it to yourself when lying in bed getting ready for sleep. Don't rush through the script, take your time and pause as you allow different parts of your body to relax.

When it's useful: This is a great thing to do before going to sleep as it really relaxes both body and mind. If you want to do something similar during the day you can focus on one bit of your body – such as your hands – and just clench and relax your fists a few times.



Script for a PMR (feel free to adapt and make your own):

I am going to direct your attention to your body and the different muscles in your body, starting with the top of your head. Focus your attention on the very top of your head. Be aware of how it feels and how your scalp feels across the top of your head and all around your hairline. Start to feel the muscles across your scalp relax and loosen. You can feel any tension melting away as your scalp loosens and relaxes. Move your attention to your forehead and let that relaxation wash down from your scalp and into your forehead and face. Across your forehead and your temples you can feel the muscles relaxing... relaxing and smoothing out... good. Your forehead feels smooth and comfortable and the whole of the top of your head is relaxed.

Now move your attention to your face. Feel the muscles round your eyes start to relax. All the small muscles around your eyes and your eyebrows are softening and relaxing. They are loosening and smoothing out. Your eyelids feel comfortable and at ease and the muscles around your eyes feel so comfortable. Now the muscles across your face and in your cheeks also start to relax. Your cheeks loosen and you can feel your jaw loosening and any tension in your jaw melting away... The muscles around and beneath your ears are softening as your jaw relaxes. Perhaps your mouth will open slightly as the muscles in your chin relax, and that's fine. Your tongue rests comfortably in your mouth and your face is relaxed. If you need to move as you relax, that's fine.

Bring your attention to your neck now and the back of your neck. From your hairline at the back and down your neck, feel the muscles loosening and elongating. As the muscles soften, your neck feels comfortable and relaxed and your head feels light and easy just resting on your neck. If you want to move your head to the side or if your chin wants drop slightly that's fine... move if necessary so that your head and neck can enjoy feeling very relaxed. You feel very comfortable and your neck is relaxed and at ease.

As the muscles in your neck continue to relax you can feel this relaxation moving now into your shoulders as your attention moves down into your shoulders. Across your shoulders the muscles relax and your shoulders feel loose and comfortable. They feel relaxed and comfortable. If you want to just roll them gently as they relax that's fine.

Now feel the muscles in the tops of your arms relaxing, down to your elbows, and your arms are feeling heavy and comfortable as they relax and any tension drops away. Feel this warm comfortable sensation move down, through your elbows and down your lower arms... and into your hands. Your hands are relaxing, your palms feel soft and your fingers relax. All the muscles in your arms are now relaxed, all the way down to your fingertips, and you feel warm and comfortable....

Bring your attention now to your chest and to your breathing. Your breathing is even and relaxed. It is unforced and easy, and you can feel your breath moving in and out... in and out. Feel your chest area relax as you breathe in and out... in and out.... Good.

All the muscles between your ribs are relaxed and comfortable and just gently supporting your breathing as the breath moves in... and out... Your breath is moving easily and the muscles in your upper back and chest area are softening and relaxing... relaxing. Focus for a moment more on your breath; with every in-breath imagine the breath moving through your whole body, washing your whole body with a feeling of calm and peace... The breath moves easily and brings that relaxation through your entire body. With every out-breath, feel any tension melting away, leaving your body

more and more calm, more and more relaxed... so comfortable and so peaceful. In... and out.... In... and out... that's right. Your breath is calm and easy, you are peaceful and relaxed.

Breathe deeply now down into your stomach and feel your diaphragm and stomach relaxing too. Bring your attention fully to your stomach and feel your tummy loosen and relax. Your stomach supports your breathing and each breath relaxes your stomach more.

As the tummy relaxes with every breath you can feel your lower belly, your hips and the muscles in your lower back begin to soften... with every out-breath, your lower back is relaxing and feeling loose and easy. The muscles feel long, soft and comfortable and you feel so relaxed.

As these large muscles in your lower back soften and relax you can feel your hips and pelvic area relaxing more and more and down to the tops of your legs. Feel the long muscles of your thighs loosening and relaxing, the tops of your legs relaxing and down into your knees. Your knees feel soft and comfortable and that feeling of relaxation moves down through your knees and into your calves and shins. Your legs feel warm, heavy and comfortable.

Your whole body feels relaxed and comfortable. Good. Feel your ankles relax and soften and feel this easing of tension move finally into your feet. Let your feet relax. Feel your instep smoothing and the arch of your feet softening. The muscles feel comfortable and soft all the way down to your toes as finally your whole body is so relaxed, so comfortable. Just enjoy that feeling of being totally relaxed. Relaxed and comfortable and totally at ease.

Now your whole body is relaxed, all your muscles are soft and comfortable, and you are feeling so peaceful... as relaxed as you can be and so comfortable, so calm.

Optional: Now begin to imagine you are in a place... somewhere that you really like. A relaxing place in nature, maybe. It can be a real place that you have been to... or it might be somewhere imaginary, or even fantastical. Wherever it is, this is a place where you feel relaxed and secure and a place that is your place and you have complete control of how it looks and how it behaves – it is a safe and comfortable place that you can bring this place to life in your mind's eye. Look around you and think about what you can see. What is the space like? What is the light like? Look at the colours around you and see and feel the textures. Think about how the place feels and how it feels for you to be there. Are you standing or sitting, or even floating in this place? Engage all your senses ... perhaps you can hear things – or perhaps you can even smell or taste something in this place. Spend a moment just being here and enjoying that feeling of comfort and complete relaxation... notice how calm you feel and how relaxed your body now is.

Use if you are doing this during the day rather than as an aid to sleep: Now it's time to bring your awareness back to this room, feeling wonderfully calm and relaxed. I'll just count to five to give you time to reorient yourself and bring your attention back to the here and now. One... noticing again the room around you... Two... maybe you can hear the everyday noises around you again ... Three... noticing the space around you, the sense of your arms and legs... Four... feeling alert and present in the room and ready to open your eyes... Five. Open your eyes.

Feel free to stretch and take a minute to readjust.