

HANDOUT 9-3

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

Find yourself a comfortable position.

1. To begin, take three deep belly breaths, exhaling slowly each time. As you exhale, imagine that tension throughout your body begins to flow away.
2. Clench your fists. Hold for 7–10 seconds and then release for 15–20 seconds. Use these same time intervals for all other muscle groups.
3. Tighten your biceps by drawing your forearms up toward your shoulders and “making a muscle” with both arms. Hold . . . and then relax.
4. Tighten your triceps—the muscles on the undersides of your upper arms—by extending your arms out straight and locking your elbows. Hold . . . and then relax.
5. Tighten the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as far as you can. Hold . . . and then relax. Imagine your forehead muscles becoming smooth and limp as they relax.
6. Tighten the muscles around your eyes by clenching your eyelids tightly shut. Hold . . . and then relax. Imagine sensations of deep relaxation spreading all around them.
7. Tighten your jaws by opening your mouth so widely that you stretch the muscles around the hinges of your jaw. Hold . . . and then relax. Let your lips part and allow your jaw to hang loose.
8. Tighten the muscles in the back of your neck by pulling your head way back, as if you were going to touch your head to your back (be gentle with this muscle group to avoid injury). Focus only on tensing the muscles in your neck. Hold . . . and then relax. Since this area is often especially tight, it’s good to do the tighten–relax cycle twice.
9. Take a few deep breaths and tune in to the weight of your head sinking into whatever surface it is resting on.
10. Tighten your shoulders by raising them up as if you were going to touch your ears. Hold . . . and then relax.
11. Tighten the muscles around your shoulder blades by pushing your shoulder blades back as if you were going to touch them together. Hold the tension in your shoulder blades . . . and then relax. Since this area is often especially tight, you might repeat the tighten–relax sequence twice.
12. Tighten the muscles of your chest by taking in a deep breath. Hold for up to 10 seconds . . . and then release slowly. Imagine any excess tension in your chest flowing away with the exhalation.
13. Tighten your stomach muscles by sucking your stomach in. Hold . . . and then release. Imagine a wave of relaxation spreading through your abdomen.
14. Tighten your lower back by arching it up. Hold . . . and then relax.
15. Tighten your buttocks by pulling them together. Hold . . . and then relax. Imagine the muscles in your hips going loose and limp.
16. Squeeze the muscles in your thighs all the way down to your knees. You will probably have to tighten your hips along with your thighs, since the thigh muscles attach at the pelvis. Hold . . . and then relax. Feel your thigh muscles smoothing out and relaxing completely.
17. Tighten your calf muscles by pulling your toes toward you (flex carefully to avoid cramps). Hold . . . and then relax.
18. Tighten your feet by curling your toes downward. Hold . . . and then relax.
19. Now imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading throughout your body, starting at your head and gradually penetrating every muscle group all the way down to your toes.

This exercise was adapted from (Jacobson, 2012).