

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a relaxation strategy proven by research to reduce symptoms of anxiety. Chronic stress and anxiety can lead to tensed muscles that can cause tightness, aches and pain. PMR uses the process of tensing and releasing muscle groups, deep breathing and observation to induce a state of relaxation. In addition, this skill increases awareness of physical sensations of anxiety and stress and promotes confidence in the ability to manage it. PMR exercises are most effective when used 1-2 times a day.

To begin, locate a quiet, dimly lit room and lie down on a comfortable surface with shoes off. With closed eyes, if comfortable, breathe deeply and slowly from the abdomen. Follow the sequence below starting with feet and systematically moving upward remembering to inhale each time a muscle group is tightened. Do not tense to the point of discomfort or cramping. Tense each muscle group 5-10 seconds and exhale as you relax for 15-20 seconds. Take time to observe the difference in how the muscles feel as the tension is released.

PMR Sequence

1. Point feet and toes
2. Straighten legs and squeeze knees together
3. Flatten stomach towards spine
4. Arch back and draw shoulder blades together
5. Bend hands back at wrists
6. Put palms of hands together and press
7. Raise shoulders up to ears
8. Clench teeth and smile
9. Squeeze eyes shut and wrinkle nose
10. Lift eyebrows up

