

Exercise 7: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

A simple exercise that eases muscles, while calming the mind. PMR, or Progressive Muscle Relaxation as it's called, is often taught by coaches and therapists to their clients for those purposes. PMR brings oxygen to the body while flushing out toxins and also helps to unknot muscles around your lymph, which then boosts your immune system. Doing it nice and easy might take ten, fifteen minutes at first, then it gets easier.

You'll find that PMR is intrinsic to much of the work that we'll do from hereon in. Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed. This might be at home in a recliner, or in nature—anywhere with minimal distractions, and with no cellphone, computer, kids, or spouses about. You can lie down, or not. Wear loose, comfortable clothing, and remove your shoes.

We will target fourteen muscle groups, one area at a time. For instance, you can focus on the muscles of your left hand. Take a breath, and as you inhale, squeeze the muscles for ten seconds. Really feel the tension. Make the muscle tension deliberate, yet gentle. As you exhale, relax the muscles. Hold the relaxed state for about ten seconds, then move on to the next muscle group. After you've completed all of the muscle groups, notice how you feel.

The most common strategy is to work your way up starting at your feet and slowly moving upward. For example:

1. Toes: Curl the toes of your left foot without tensing your legs. Hold them for five seconds, counting slowly. Release them and relax. Count to ten, keeping your toes relaxed.
2. Feet and toes: Curl your toes and foot for five seconds, then relax.
3. Calf muscle: Flex your left calf muscle by pulling your toes toward you.
4. Thigh: Contract your left thigh muscles tightly. Hold that for about ten seconds, then relax for ten seconds. (Repeat on the right side.)
5. Left hand: Clench your fist for five seconds, then relax it.
6. Left arm: Tighten your biceps by drawing your forearm up toward your shoulder and making a muscle, while clenching the fist. (Repeat on right side.)
7. Buttocks: Tense and squeeze your buttocks together for ten seconds. Relax for ten seconds and feel yourself releasing the tension.
8. Stomach: Tighten your abdominal muscles by pulling in your stomach for ten seconds. Relax and fully release your stomach muscles for ten seconds.
9. Chest: Take a long, deep breath, tighten your chest muscles, and hold for ten seconds. Exhale and relax for ten seconds, breathing comfortably.
10. Neck: Tighten your neck muscles for ten seconds, then relax for ten seconds.

Rewired for Sleep

Daniel R. Bernstein, L. Ac., CH

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11. Shoulders: Raise your shoulders up, hold that for ten seconds, then relax them for ten seconds. Do not push this pose if you have an injury.

12. Jaw: Clench then unclench your jaw, then open your mouth wide to stretch out.

13. Eyes: Clench your eyelids tightly shut, then relax them. Open them widely for ten seconds, then relax them for ten seconds.

14. Forehead: Raise your eyebrows, then relax them.

*This exercise is from the book *Rewired for Sleep* by Daniel R. Bernstein, L. Ac., CH published by Aconagua Press, 2019.*

Along with other exercises from the book, and many other audio and video resources designed to help you release stress and anxiety, repair insomnia and achieve better sleep naturally, it can be downloaded from Dan Bernstein's website <https://rewiredforsleep.com> where you can also purchase the book.

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