

Progressive muscle relaxation

Relaxation is one of the most important skills for controlling and decreasing pain and other symptoms of osteoarthritis, as well as stress, fatigue and difficulty sleeping.

Relaxation is a skill that can be learned just as any other skill such as driving a car or typing.

Progressive muscle relaxation teaches you how to pay attention to feelings of tension and relaxation in your body. This is done by tensing various muscle groups. By tensing muscles, it makes it easier for you to release them and become more relaxed. You will learn to keep tension in your body at a low level. Less tension usually means less pain.



How to start

First you need to find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Make the environment as relaxing as possible, turn down lights, turn off your phone, put on some gentle music to block out any distracting noises. If you are comfortable to do so, close your eyes.

Relax your body. Breathe slowly and evenly. Take your time to focus on smooth, even breaths.

Starting at your feet, point the toes of your right foot, slowly flexing and tightening the muscles. Notice the tension, hold this for a few seconds, then relax.

Now do the same with your left foot, slowly flexing and tightening the muscles, and noticing the tension. Hold for a few seconds, then relax.

Move onto your calves. Slowly curl the toes of your right foot, pointing your foot so that you are tightening the calf muscle. Notice the tension. Hold for a few seconds, then relax. Move onto your left calf.

Continue to work your way through your muscle groups, tensing the muscles as you go, noticing the tension and holding for a few seconds, then relax.

Right foot – point your toes, relax

Left foot – point your toes, relax

Right calf – curl your toes pointing your foot towards your calf, relax

Left calf – curl your toes pointing your foot towards your calf, relax

Right thigh – tighten the muscles, relax

Left thigh – tighten the muscles, relax

Buttocks – squeeze the muscles, relax

Stomach – suck it in, relax

Chest – breathe in deeply filling your lungs and chest, then breathe out

Back – pull your shoulder blades together, relax

Chest – Breathe in deeply filling your lungs, then breathe out

Back – pull your shoulder blades together, relax

Shoulders – shrug your shoulders up to your ears, relax

Neck – pull your head back slowly as though you are looking at the ceiling, relax

Forehead – raise your eyebrows as far as possible, relax

Eyes – squeeze your eyes shut, relax

Jaw – open your mouth wide, relax

TIPS

Don't tense your muscles so hard that they cramp or you feel pain.

Don't tense and relax areas where you're having intense pain. You might want to try a different form of relaxation, or skip that muscle group.

This relaxation technique can be done anywhere, and can be done sitting or lying down.