

 **Coping** Intervention 20 min Client Yes

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Muscle tension is commonly associated with stress and anxiety. Our muscles become tense when we detect danger because of activation of the fight or flight response. Other physiological changes include increased heart rate, sweating, dilated pupils, and quick and shallow breathing. These changes help prepare the body to respond to the threat most quickly and efficiently.

Nowadays, our fight or flight response becomes activated in situations that are not necessarily dangerous. For example, when we are sitting in traffic, about to give a presentation, or received an uncomfortable email. As a consequence, we are unknowingly spending much of our waking (and sleeping) hours with muscle tension, such as tight shoulders, a clenched jaw, and furrowed brows.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a technique that can help reduce muscle tension and associated stress and anxiety. PMR was first introduced by Jacobson in 1938. The technique involves progressively tensing and relaxing muscles in different parts of the body, leading to a reduction in physiological tension (Jacobson, 1938). Empirical evidence indicates that PMR can help with tension headaches, anxiety, insomnia, and chronic pain management (McCallie, Blum, & Hood, 2006; Rausch, Gramling, & Auerbach, 2006).



### Author

This tool was created by Lucinda Poole (Ph.D.).



### Goal

This tool aims to teach clients how to relieve muscle tension.



## Advice

- Check whether the client has any physical injuries before commencing PMR. If there is an injury, have your client consult his or her doctor before engaging in PMR.
- Create an optimal environment by minimizing distraction (shut open windows, turn off any music, soften the lighting if possible) and ensuring the clients are comfortable in their seats. They might like to remove their shoes.
- Avoid engaging in PMR soon after a large, heavy meal. If the client recently ate, save PMR for the second half of the session or potentially subsequent session.



## References

- Jacobson, E. (1938). *Progressive relaxation: A physiological and clinical investigation of muscular states and their significance in psychology and medical practice*. University of Chicago Press.
- McCallie, M. S., Blum, C. M., & Hood, C. J. (2006). Progressive muscle relaxation. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 13(3), 51-66.
- Rausch, S. M., Gramling, S. E., & Auerbach, S. M. (2006). Effects of a single session of large-group meditation and progressive muscle relaxation training on stress reduction, reactivity, and recovery. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 13(3), 273-290.



# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

## Instructions

Progressive muscle relaxation is a technique that involves progressively tensing and releasing muscles in different parts of the body. As you tense each muscle group, make sure you can feel the tension but not to a point where it hurts. You will keep the muscle tensed for about 5 seconds. After releasing, allow your muscles to relax for about 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say silently to yourself “relax” as you do this.

We will start with brief mindfulness practice to bring us into the present moment and our bodies before commencing progressive muscle relaxation.

1. Gently close your eyes and come into the present moment. Bring your attention to your body, sitting here comfortably. Feet are grounded into the floor. Hands are resting on your lap. [10 secs]
2. Now, tense the right hand and forearm. Make a fist with your right hand and hold tightly for 1-2-3-4-5. Now relax. [10 secs]
3. Now tense the right upper arm. Raise your forearm to make a right angle with your shoulder and hold for 1-2-3-4-5. Relax. [10 secs]
4. Now tense the left hand and forearm for 1-2-3-4-5. Relax. [10 secs]
5. Now the left upper arm. Hold for 1-2-3-4-5. Relax. [10 secs]
6. Now the forehead. Raise your eyebrows as high as they can go, as though you are surprised by something. Hold here for 5. And relax. [10 secs]
7. Eyes and cheeks now. Squeeze your eyes tight shut and tense your upper cheeks for the count of 5. Relax. [10 secs]
8. Now the mouth and jaw. Open your mouth as wide as you can, as if you are yawning. Hold for 5, and then relax. [10 secs]
9. Moving to the neck now. Take special care when tensing these muscles, as we tend to hold a lot of tension in the neck. Gently tilt your head back, as if you are looking at the ceiling. Hold here for 1-2-3-4-5. Relax. [10 secs]
10. Now the shoulders. Bring your shoulders up towards your ears and hold here for 5. And relax for 10. [10 secs]
11. Moving to the shoulder blades and back now. Press your shoulder blades backward, as if you are trying to touch them together. Puff your chest out. Hold for 5 and relax for 10. [10 secs].
12. Now the chest and belly. Take a deep breath in, filling up your lungs and chest with air. Hold for 1-2-3-4-5 and relax. [10 secs]
13. Hips and buttocks now. Squeeze your buttock muscles for 1-2-3-4-5. And relax. [10 secs]



14. Moving to the right upper leg, tense the muscles in your right thigh for 1-2-3-4-5. Relax. [10 secs]
15. The right lower leg now. Leaving your feet planted on the floor, carefully pull your toes towards you to stretch and tense the calf muscle. Hold for 5 and relax for 10.
16. Now the right foot. Leave your heel planted and raise your toes. From here, curl your toes downwards, and hold for 5. Relax. [10 secs]
17. Moving to the left upper leg now, tense the muscles in your left thigh for 1-2-3-4-5. Relax. [10 secs]
18. Now focus on the lower left leg. Leave your feet planted on the floor and carefully pull your toes towards you to tense the calf muscle. Hold for 5 and relax for 10.
19. Move on to the right foot. Leave your heel planted, raise your toes, and scrunch your toes downwards. Hold for 5 and relax for 10. [10 secs]
20. Now that you have relaxed every muscle group in your body, take 3 deep, cleansing breaths. Allow any residual muscle tension to leave the body as you exhale. Once you have finished, gently open your eyes and come back into the room.