

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation for Stress Relief

Progressive muscle relaxation involves a two-step process in which you systematically tense and relax different muscle groups in the body. With regular practice, progressive muscle relaxation gives you an intimate familiarity with what tension—as well as complete relaxation—feels like in different parts of the body. This awareness helps you spot and counteract the first signs of the muscular tension that accompanies stress. And as your body relaxes, so will your mind.

### Practicing progressive muscle relaxation

Most progressive muscle relaxation practitioners start at the feet and work their way up to the face. For a sequence of muscle groups to follow, see the box below.

- Take a few minutes to relax, breathing in and out in slow, deep breaths.
- When you're relaxed and ready to start, shift your attention to your right foot. Take a moment to focus on the way it feels.
- Slowly tense the muscles in your right foot, squeezing as tightly as you can. Hold for a count of 10.
- Relax your right foot. Focus on the tension flowing away and the way your foot feels as it becomes limp and loose.
- Stay in this relaxed state for a moment, breathing deeply and slowly.
- When you're ready, shift your attention to your left foot. Follow the same sequence of muscle tension and release.
- Move slowly up through your body, contracting and relaxing the muscle groups as you go.
- It may take some practice at first, but try not to tense muscles other than those intended.

### Progressive Muscle Relaxation Sequence

The most popular sequence runs as follows:

- |                |                      |                        |
|----------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| 1. Right foot* | 6. Left thigh        | 11. Right arm and hand |
| 2. Left foot   | 7. Hips and buttocks | 12. Left arm and hand  |
| 3. Right calf  | 8. Stomach           | 13. Neck and shoulders |
| 4. Left calf   | 9. Chest             | 14. Face               |
| 5. Right thigh | 10. Back             |                        |

\* If you are left-handed you may want to begin with your left foot instead.