



PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

A Guide for Athletes



WHAT IS PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION TECHNIQUE?

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a relaxation tool that involves light tightening followed by relaxing various muscle groups in the body, focusing on one muscle group at a time. The purpose of PMR is to release the tension stored in the muscles to help create a physiological relaxed state to support performing tasks more effectively and to bring awareness to the level on tension held in specific body regions. In addition to relaxing the body, PMR contributes to an increased focus and calm mental and emotional state.



BENEFITS?

Since stress is naturally stored in the muscles, it is important to relax the tension in order to perform at your best. By incorporating PMR into your performance routine, the following health benefits occur:

- Reduced of stress tension
- Improved sleep
- Increased focus
- Headaches relief



PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION SCRIPT

Find a quiet space, turn off phone or limit possible distractions before beginning.

Throughout this exercise, you may visualize the muscles tensing and a wave of relaxation flowing through each muscle as you release the tension. It is important you continue to breathe throughout the exercise.

If you find your mind wandering, gently return to the breath or muscle being activated to re-focus your attention on what's in your control. Remember to lightly tense your muscles, not over strain.

Now let's begin.

Close your eyes.

Begin by finding a comfortable position either sitting or lying down.

Take a deep breath through your nose for a count of 4 (feel your stomach rise), hold for 4 seconds, and exhale slowly out your mouth for a count of 8 (stomach comes towards your spine).

Again, as you breathe notice your stomach rising and your lungs filling with air.

As you exhale, imagine the tension in your body being released and flowing out of your body.

And again inhale... and exhale. Feel your body already relaxing.

As you go through each step, remember to keep breathing.

Now tighten the muscles in your forehead by raising your eyebrows as high as you can. Hold for about five seconds and release for 10 seconds.

Now smile widely, feeling your mouth and cheeks tense. Hold for about 5 seconds and release, enjoying the softness in your face. Relax for about 10 seconds.

Now, gently pull your head back as if to look at the ceiling. Hold for about 5 seconds and release, feeling the tension melting away. Continue to relax for about 10 seconds.

Now, feel the weight of your relaxed head and neck sink.

Continue to breathe in and out, following your breath as you inhale and exhale.

Letting go of all the stress tension.

Now, lightly tense without straining, clench your fists and hold this position for 5 seconds and release. Relax for about 10 seconds.

Now, flex your biceps. Feel that buildup of tension. You may even visualize that muscle tightening. Hold for about 5 seconds and release, visualizing a wave of relaxation going through your muscle. Continue to breathe in and out.

Now, tighten your triceps by extending your arms out and locking your elbows. Hold for about 5 seconds and release. Relax for about 10 seconds.

Now lift your shoulders up as if they could touch your ears. Hold for about 5 seconds and quickly release, feeling the heaviness of your shoulders relax. Pause for about 10 seconds.

Lightly tense your upper back by pulling your shoulders back trying to make your shoulder blades touch. Hold for about 5 seconds and release.

Relax for about 10 seconds, imagine waves of relaxation flow across your shoulder blades.

Gently arch your lower back. Hold for about 5 seconds and relax for about 10 seconds.

Continue to let go of the tension and stress.

Now, tighten your glutes. Hold for about 5 seconds, release and relax for about 10 seconds.

Tighten your thighs by pressing your knees together as if you were holding a penny between them. Hold for about 5 seconds... and release.

Continue to imagine the wave of relaxation flow through your thighs for about 10 seconds.

Now, flex your feet, pulling your toes towards you and feeling the tension in your calves. Hold for about 5 seconds and relax, feeling the weight of your legs sinking down. Pause for about 10 seconds.

Curl your toes under, tensing your feet. Hold for about 5 seconds, release. Pause for about 10 seconds.

Now, do a body scan from head to toe and activate whatever muscle is still tense in your body. Lightly tense this muscle for 5 seconds and relax for 10 seconds.

Lightly tense your whole entire body, and then release for 10 seconds while continuing to focus on your breath.

Now imagine a wave of relaxation slowly spreading through your body beginning at your head and going all the way down to your feet.

Feel the weight of your relaxed body. Breathe in.. and out... in... out... in... out.

Take a deep breath through your nose for a count of 4 (feel your stomach rise), hold for 4 seconds, and exhale slowly out your mouth for a count of 8 (stomach comes towards your spine).

Again, as you breathe, notice your stomach rising and your lungs filling with air.

As you exhale, imagine the tension in your body being released and flowing out of your body.

Now, open your eyes.

CONDENSED PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION ROUTINE

During practice and competition, you may only have a few seconds to use Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique to refocus, reset, and relax the mind and body. Therefore, it is important to use the main skills learned in the script and condense into a few seconds of a routine.

- Activate a muscle group to lightly tense and relax (e.g., clench your fist and relax)
- Focus on deep breathing
- Repeat

WHY HAVE A ROUTINE TO PRACTICE PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION?

It is important to have a routine when implementing any mental skill. When it comes to Progressive Muscle Relaxation, developing a routine can further support your mental and emotional optimal performing state (the state you need to be in to perform at your best).

There are lots of possible stressors at competition, which can trigger a stress response. Not all stress is bad, some stress is good! However, when your stress response becomes heightened it can become anxiety, which can impact your performance in an unhelpful way. Since stress is naturally stored in our bodies, it is important to reduce built-up tension.

To perform with ease and flow, having a relaxed body can further support this state. Practicing and rehearsing Progressive Muscle Relaxation is one of many tools you can use to help you prepare for competition.

HOW AND WHEN CAN I PRACTICE PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION?

There are many ways to rehearse Progressive Muscle Relaxation. It is important to train the brain to know how to cope and manage high stress and possible anxiousness when arises. Therefore, flexing your brain muscles is very important!

TIPS ON WHEN TO PRACTICE PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

AT HOME

- First thing in the morning
- Before bed – helps promote sleep
- In a quiet space

TIPS ON HOW TO USE PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

AT SPORTING PRACTICE

- On the way to practice (e.g., in the car, bus)
- At practice facility (e.g., in dressing room, quiet room)
- During practice* (e.g., before practicing a drill you may feel less confident in or triggers some anxiousness, during water breaks, after a mistake to help reset and refocus, when emotions are heightened, pre-shot routine)

BEFORE COMPETITION

- Quiet space at sporting venue
- In dressing room at sporting venue
- While stretching during warm up to release tension built up in muscles
- While changing into sporting equipment
- Moments before stepping into the sporting grounds to perform* (e.g., before stepping onto ice, field, track, pool, course/fairway, etc.)
- If traveling for competition (away games), practice before bed in hotel to help with sleep, especially if anxiousness and mind racing tends to happen the night before competition.

DURING COMPETITION*

- Between shifts, holes, plays, etc.
- Between periods, breaks, timeouts, etc.
- Before executing a certain skill or play you may feel anxious (e.g., pre-shot, right before putting the golf ball on the greens).
- After making a mistake to help reset and refocus
- When emotions are getting high (e.g., frustration, anger, fear)
- When unhelpful thoughts are occurring, incorporate mindfulness by redirecting from thought to breath awareness
- After game during cool down
- When debriefing after a tough loss to manage feelings of possible frustration, anger, embarrassment, etc.

Quick Tip!

**When you only have a few seconds to rehearse, use the skills you learned in the Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique script and apply it during practice or competition – tense and release chosen activated muscles along with a deep breath.*

MAKE A PLAN TO REHEARSE

Now it's time to make your specific and attainable plan to help you stay consistent with regular rehearsal of Progressive Muscle Relaxation! Let's build an awesome habit out of Progressive Muscle Relaxation.

We encourage you to select a time a sporting practice and a time at home to schedule in progressive muscle relation rehearsals and create two separate plans of what this looks like.

How many days a week?

What time of day?

For how long?

When? (before practice, during practice, etc.)

What will help remind me to practice Progressive Muscle Relaxation at these times? (e.g., phone calendar or reminders, write it in a physical calendar.)

Are there any distractions that can interfere with my plan? (If so, what will I need to do in case distractions arise? It is important to know what you need to do in case a distraction occurs to help you stay consistent with rehearsing your plan.)

Set a review day. (Have a review day once a week to touch base on how your rehearsal plan of Progressive Muscle Relaxation is going. If you need to adjust, review what areas you would like to make adjustments in that will best support you. Once you become consistent with your goal, slowly increase the length of time or number of days during the week, etc.)

How can I use Progressive Muscle Relaxation Technique at practice and at competition to best support my performance state?

QUESTIONS?

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