

progressive muscle relaxation

This is a **little better zine**.

It doesn't have the solutions to your big problems, but the skills inside can make coping a **little** easier when life is difficult.

Learn more at **littlebetterzine.com**

Learning how to relax my body when I feel stressed is important to me because:

► Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is a **two-step** technique for stress management. Anyone can learn it with practice.

Stress affects both the mind and the body – it includes both emotional distress and physical tension.

Changing unpleasant emotions is hard, but you can learn how to change the physical symptoms of stress. If you learn how to relax your muscles, you will find that distressing emotions will feel less intense.

Progressive muscle relaxation can help with anxiety, insomnia, headaches, high blood pressure, and other stress-related health problems.

► Step 1 – Inhale and Tighten

Find a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down.

Breathe in and make fists, clench the muscles in your hands.

Notice how the tension feels as you slowly inhale.

Your hands should feel tense, but not painful.

► Step 2 – Exhale and Release

As you **breathe out**, release the tension in your hands.

Take a few more slow, calming breaths – in and out – as the tension drains away from your hands.

What sensations do you notice in your hands as they relax? Maybe they feel warm, tingly, heavy, or some other sensation.

When you think you've relaxed your hands as much as possible, try relaxing them even more.

Take your time.

► Relaxing Your Whole Body

After you learn **Step 1** and **Step 2**, you can repeat the process of tensing and releasing other muscle groups in your body.

You should tense each group of muscles enough to feel tight, but this technique should never be painful.

Take your time and breathe at a calm, comfortable pace.

Here are 14 muscle groups you can tighten (inhale) and release (exhale), one muscle group at a time:

1. **hands** – clench your fists
2. **arms in** – bend your elbows and tighten your biceps
3. **arms out** – straighten arms and tighten your triceps
4. **shoulders** – shrug your shoulders up to your ears
5. **forehead** – wrinkle your forehead
6. **eyes** – shut your eyes tightly
7. **mouth** – lips together, tongue on the roof of your mouth
8. **neck down** – push chin down to chest
9. **neck up** – turn your head up to look above you
10. **back** – arch back and bring shoulder blades together
11. **abdomen** – tighten your abdominal muscles
12. **buttocks** – clench your buttocks
13. **thighs** – tighten your thighs
14. **calves** – point your toes down

You can tighten and release a muscle group multiple times if you want, or you can focus on fewer muscle groups if you need to release tension from a specific area in your body.

Warning signs that I'm feeling stressed:

► Practice Makes Different

With regular practice, you will become more familiar with the physical sensations of tension and relaxation.

You may also learn to notice the early physical signs when stress is building up inside your body.

Progressive muscle relaxation is not a cure for the problems which cause stress, but it can make coping with stress a little easier.

► Try It Without Tensing Muscles

You can also try progressive muscle relaxation **without** tensing any of your muscles – this modified technique is simply called **progressive relaxation**, and it may work better for you if clenching your muscles feels difficult or unpleasant.

To practice progressive relaxation, relax the 14 muscle groups one-by-one **without** tensing them. Just skip **Step 1** and practice **Step 2** only, relaxing each muscle group one at a time as you slowly exhale.

Record each time you practiced progressive muscle relaxation:

A grid of 30 circles arranged in 3 rows and 10 columns, intended for a dot-marker activity.