

SYSTEMATIC MUSCLE RELAXATION

Practise the following exercises at home once a day, or alternatively use the 'Relaxation Response' instructions.

Begin by sitting in a comfortable chair. Your legs should be uncrossed, head resting on the back of the chair, and arms resting on the arms of the chair. No part of your body should require the use of muscles for support. Close your eyes to minimise external stimulation. The room should be quiet and the lights dimmed if possible.

Clench the arm of the chair with your right hand. Tense the muscles of your right hand, forearm, and biceps. Tense until it trembles. Feel the muscles pull across your fingers and lower part of your forearm. Hold this position for 5 to 7 seconds, then relax, just let your hand go. Pay attention to the muscles of your right hand and forearm as they relax even more until your arm and hand are completely relaxed with no tension at all, warm and relaxed. Go through this process twice.

Go through the same process with your left hand as you did with your right. Tense your left hand, forearm and biceps. Use the right hand as a reference point, that is, move on when your biceps, forearm and hand of your left arm are as completely relaxed as those of your right arm.

Proceed to the other muscle groups listed below in the same manner. As you tense and then relax these muscles note how they feel as they relax; feel the relaxation and warmth flow through these muscles; pay attention to these muscles so that later you can relax them again. Always use the preceding group of relaxed muscles as a reference for moving on to others.

- *Frown hard, tensing muscles of forehead and top of head (these muscles often "tingle" as they relax).*
- *Clench teeth, feeling jaw muscles and cheek.*
- *Tighten chin and throat muscles, feeling two muscles in front of throat.*
- *Tighten chest muscles and muscles across back - feel muscles pull below shoulder blades.*
- *Tighten abdominal muscles - make abdomen hard.*
- *Tighten muscles of right leg and calf - push down with toes and arch - apply pressure on ball of foot.*
- *Tighten muscles of left leg and calf - feel muscles in bottom of left calf.*

If, after going through all the muscle groups, you feel any tension anywhere in the body, go back and repeat the tension-release cycle for that part of the body. It is often helpful to take a deep breath while tensing muscles and to let it go while releasing. Should any muscle group not respond after four trials, move on and return to it later. **Caution:** if you develop muscle cramps or spasms from prolonged tension of muscles shorten the tension interval a few seconds and do not tense your muscles as hard.



"RELAXATION RESPONSE" INSTRUCTIONS

1. Select a quiet place. (If necessary, put a sign on the door.) Disconnect your telephone.
2. Select a time during the day when you can afford 20 minutes. Preferably this time should not be less than 2 hours after a meal. For some people a good choice of time is before breakfast and before dinner. A particularly good time is when you are under stress.
3. Find a comfortable chair. Sit in any position in which you feel at ease. But do not lie down, you may fall asleep. Loosen any tight clothes, take off your shoes.
4. Close your eyes.
5. Begin to relax by thinking about relaxing while successively thinking about your feet, legs, trunk, body, arms, neck and head.
6. Breathe through your nose and become aware of your breathing.
7. As you breathe say mentally a very simple one or two syllable word to yourself. Almost any word will do. Here are some words people have liked: calm, relax, one. If you don't like any of them, try a sound you like.
8. Breathe easily and naturally. If all sorts of questions, ideas, worries, come into your head as you relax, ignore them and keep repeating your chosen word.
9. You may lose your sense of time while relaxing. Check the time (20 minutes) by opening your eyes occasionally to look at your watch or clock, or set an alarm with a cushion or blanket over it, to muffle it when it rings.
10. After you finish relaxing don't jump up and walk around. First, sit quietly for a minute or so with your eyes closed, then with your eyes open.

Adapted from R.K. Peters and H. Benson, "Time Out From Tension", H.B.R. January, 1978



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