

Muscle Relaxation Exercises

Some people find that muscle relaxation exercises are helpful in reducing stress. It takes time to learn and practice them, but it can be worth the effort. Two types of simple muscle relaxation techniques are described below. They are not strenuous and can be done while sitting in a comfortable chair.

If a movement does not feel good to you, modify it or replace it with a movement that feels good to you. Keep in mind that learning how to relax is a skill which, like any other skill, gets better with more practice.

Tense and Release Exercise

Hands

- ❖ Make a fist with both hands. Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- ❖ Relax your hands. Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- ❖ Repeat the tensing and relaxing cycle a total of five times.
- ❖ Press your palms together, pushing against each other. Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- ❖ Relax your hands and hold them in your lap for 5 seconds.
- ❖ Repeat the tensing and relaxing cycle a total of five times.

Shoulders

- ❖ Lift your shoulders up towards your ears. Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- ❖ Relax your shoulders and arms. Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- ❖ Repeat the tensing and relaxing cycle a total of five times.

Legs

- ❖ Raise your knees by lifting your heels off the floor and leaving your toes on the floor. Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- ❖ Lower your heels to the floor and relax your legs. Hold this position for 5 seconds.
- ❖ Repeat the tensing and relaxing cycle a total of five times.

Stretching Exercise

1. Let your head drop gently forward, with your chin toward your chest. Count to 5 then return to the neutral position. Tilt your head to the right so that your right ear is approximately over your right shoulder. Count to 5 then return to the neutral position. Let your head drop gently backwards with your chin pointing toward the ceiling. Count to 5 then return to the neutral position. Tilt your head to the left so that your left ear is approximately over your left shoulder. Count to 5 then return to the neutral position.
2. Repeat these movements with your head five times.
3. Lace the fingers of your two hands together weaving them like a basket. With your palms facing inward toward your chest, extend your arms out in front of you. Hold this position for five seconds. Then reverse your palms so they are facing away from you. Hold this position for five seconds.
4. Repeat these movements with your hands and arms five times.
5. Roll your shoulders forward in a smooth gentle fashion. Rotate in a circular motion five times.
6. Reverse the motion and roll our shoulders backward in a smooth gentle fashion. Rotate in a circular motion five times.

1. Which of the relaxation exercises did you find most relaxing? _____

2. When would be good times and places to practice one or both of these exercises?
