

Progressive Relaxation

Learning to Deal with Anxiety

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Body and mind are very closely connected, events concerning one will have a profound effect on the other. If you think about it you will realise that when you are worried, scared, upset or afraid, your body reacts with tension, sweating or shakes, you might get aches and pains. When you feel tension, it has an effect on your mind, you can become worried and afraid.

This is a vicious cycle that can stop you getting on with your life, working towards your own personal goals. You might feel stuck and afraid. But you can stop this cycle, you can break out and get on with your life.

Learning a deep relaxation skill may not be the answer to all of your problems, but it can certainly help you to get to work on sorting them out. You might feel the need to get in touch with a qualified therapist and do some deeper work on the causes of your anxiety, or learn how to think in a more helpful way. Perhaps using Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), or Brief Solution Focused Therapy (BSFT). However, the skill you are about to learn is a very powerful way of taking control of your life.

The most important thing about relaxation exercises is to set aside some time and actually do them. It is really easy to read this through and think 'right, I know that' and not actually *do* anything. So, do the exercise and take it seriously. You are learning a very valuable life

skill that will help you to take control of your mind and body. Your mind and body may be stuck in a loop and you could feel like it is fighting back from time to time, it makes you feel that you couldn't be bothered or that the exercises are not helping. They do help if you are motivated to do them, if you use them over time and if you really want to take control.

Right from the very first time you do this you will start to achieve bits of relaxation, they might feel very powerful and obvious or they might be too tiny for you to be able to notice. But over a short period of time even tiny bits add together and start to have a real effect. You might feel tense during a session, don't worry about it, very soon you will feel a very real and very pleasant, warm and comfortable floaty feeling.

You can do this exercise anywhere and with practice you will develop an automatic relaxation response that you can switch on like a light switch whenever you need it. Very useful if you are feeling anxious, about to take a test, dealing with somebody who is emotional, facing a personal challenge or having to deal with a difficult problem.

To start with do this exercise every day, in different situations; at work, watching TV, doing the washing up, in the supermarket, sitting in the garden, falling asleep or wherever you happen to be where you can take ten minutes just to focus on becoming relaxed.

How to do it:

1. Try to relax and be quiet for a moment or two. If you can fix your gaze on a spot on the wall or ceiling so much the better.
2. Breathe in slowly through your nose if you can. Breathe right down into your stomach if you can. Take a pause between each breath. Breathe out through your mouth. Think of the word 'Calm' each time you breathe out.

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3. Begin by tightening the muscles of your feet, screw up your toes and tighten all the muscles in your feet. Hold them tight for a few seconds. Now relax them suddenly. Feel the relaxation come into your feet, like a feeling of warmth. Notice and enjoy that feeling. Try to let go at the same time as you breathe out and think of the word 'calm'.
4. Pause for a moment then move on to the muscles in your ankles and lower legs, as you breathe in, tighten them, tighten the muscles of your thighs and buttocks, then hold them all tight for a moment before letting every bit of tension go while breathing out and thinking of the word 'calm'. Feel the relaxation flooding into those muscles and making them more relaxed.
5. Pause for a moment then move on to your stomach, tense them up, move on to your chest and back and tense them up. Looking to tense every muscles you can find. Hold them for a moment then let go, with your out breath and think 'calm'. Take a moment to feel the relaxation coming in and flowing through those muscles.
6. Tighten the muscle of your hands. Tighten them into fists and hold tight for a few seconds. Now relax them suddenly. Feel the relaxation come into your arms, up to your shoulder, like a feeling of warmth. Notice and enjoy that feeling. Try to let go at the same time as you breathe out and think of the word 'calm'. Pause for a moment while you feel the relaxation and warmth come into your hands and fingers.
7. Now tighten your arms, chest and shoulders, tighten all the muscles, hold them for a moment and suddenly let them go and relax, while you breathe out and think the word 'calm'. Feel the relaxation coming into your arms and shoulders.
8. Move on to your neck. Tighten your neck muscles, your jaw and face and all the muscles of your head. Then let go as you breathe out and think of the word 'calm'. Feel the relaxation flowing into your face and neck.
9. Enjoy the feeling of calm and relaxation for a moment before, starting with your toes, work your way up your body and tense every muscle group you can find. When everything is tense, hold it for a moment, then suddenly let it all go while breathing out and thinking the word 'calm'. Now take as long as you like to enjoy the relaxation flooding through your body. If you have time, stay where you are and continue to slow your breathing right down. Think warm relaxing thoughts, maybe of lying in the sun, on the grass or on a beach or luxurious bed. Think warm relaxing thoughts, thing 'relax', 'calm', 'slow', 'take it easy'.
10. Enjoy the feeling of calm relaxation flowing through your mind and body.
11. When you feel that you have done enough, just carry the calm feeling with you until the cares and activities of the world come in and it fades away.
12. Do this at least once a day and pretty soon you will, just by saying the word 'calm' and looking for the feeling of relaxation in your body, be able to face any situation with a calm mind and a relaxed body.

If, after you have done this a few times, you feel that it has much more to offer than just helping you to relax, take a look at my website and maybe take the first steps into self-hypnosis! Or ring me to book a private session. Look me up on Facebook.

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