

# Progressive Muscular Relaxation

This technique provides a structured way of relaxing and taking your mind away from negative or stressful thoughts. It is also a good way of becoming aware of muscle tension during the day, for example, when you're at your desk or computer, and then consciously relaxing those muscles.

## Here's how you do it....

- You can practise in your normal clothes, although it helps if they're losing fitting. This is also a great exercise to do in the evening so wearing your pyjamas or whatever you where in bed is good.
- You need to allocate about 20 to 30 minutes to do the exercise all the way through. Find a time when you know you won't be disturbed. It can help to let people know that you're having some quiet time and you don't want to be disturbed. It can also be helpful to set an alarm as you can lose track of time when doing this exercise.
- Find a quiet and comfortable place to practise. You can do the exercises sitting down, or lying down (on your bed for example). A comfortable supporting chair or soft place to stretch out with a supporting pillow under your head and knees is a good idea. It can be helpful to do the exercises with your eyes closed, keep a steady breathing pattern going throughout the exercise. I like to use some relaxing music in the background.
- The key to getting the 'relaxation response' with this exercise is alternately tensing and relaxing the major muscle groups. For example, you might start by tensing your forearms by tightly clenching your fists. Hold the tension for a count of seven and then just 'let go', by unclenching your fists quite abruptly. Remember to keep a steady breathing pattern throughout the exercise.
- **Important Note:** As you tense and hold for the count of seven, focus your attention on your muscles, for example, on your the forearms - so that you become aware of the feeling of tension in the muscle.
- When focusing on your muscles, think about the feelings. Where is the tension? And what exactly does it feel like. Notice it, be curious about it, and notice the feeling in the muscles as you 'let go' of the tension, becoming aware of the feeling that your muscle is relaxed. Later you may want to try tensing one forearm whilst relaxing the other to notice the difference too.
- Allow an interval of 20 seconds to elapse and then repeat the tension/release pattern once or twice.
- Now use a similar pattern to progress through the main muscle groups in turn.
- Next move to the arms/shoulders ... bring tension to them by hooking the fingers together in front of you and pulling one set against the other (follow the pattern).

- If you're sitting-up, you could bring tension to your shoulder area by simply lifting your shoulders up towards to your ears and holding again for a count of seven
- Now work the legs by placing the feet flat on the floor, pressing them forward against the resistance of the floor (follow the pattern of counting to seven and then relaxing the muscles).
- Continue to progress through the main muscle systems of your body, clenching the buttocks, tightening the stomach, and tensing your facial muscles, always following the same pattern.
- When you finish the sequence you may wish to spend some time continuing to relax, in your chair or lying down.

When you are ready to move on to other things gradually re-orientate yourself to your surroundings, count inwardly up to 10, open your eyes (if closed), stretch gently, and steadily start to move about.