

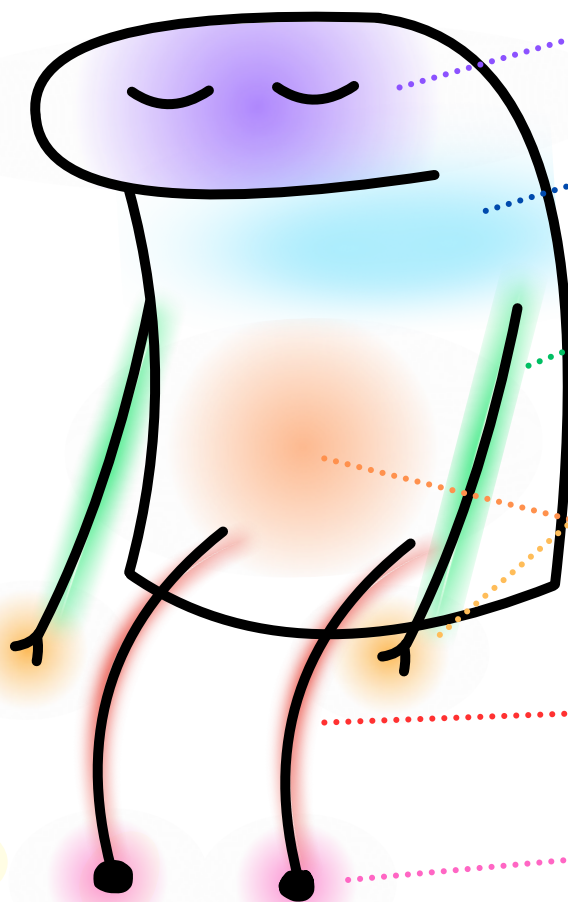
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation, or **tense and relax**, is a coping skill you can use to manage strong emotions and stressful situations. During times when we are worried or stressed, the muscles in our body often become tight. Progressive muscle relaxation is a way to relax our muscles and calm our bodies and minds.

Description: Progressive muscle relaxation is when we relax the muscles in our bodies by first tensing then relaxing one muscle group at a time.

How to do progressive muscle relaxation:

1. Get into a **relaxed position**, either sitting or lying down.
2. Take a few **deep breaths**, breathing in slowly through your nose and exhaling gently out through your mouth.
3. Starting at the top of your body and working your way down, begin **tightening then relaxing** one muscle group at a time. Inhale as you tighten the muscles. Hold for 5 seconds. Then exhale as you quickly relax the muscles.



Face

Tighten and scrunch up all the muscles in your face. You might look like you just ate a lemon! Hold then release.

Shoulders & neck

Tighten and lift your shoulders together and up to your ears. Hold then release.

Arms

Flex all the muscles in your arms. Hold then release.

Hands

Tighten your fists. Pretend you are squeezing the juice from a lemon. Hold then release.

Stomach

Pull your belly in, squeezing it toward your spine. Hold then release.

Legs

Flex all the muscles in your thighs and calves. Hold then release.

Feet

Scrunch up your toes and feet. Imagine you are walking in deep mud. Hold then release.

Whole body

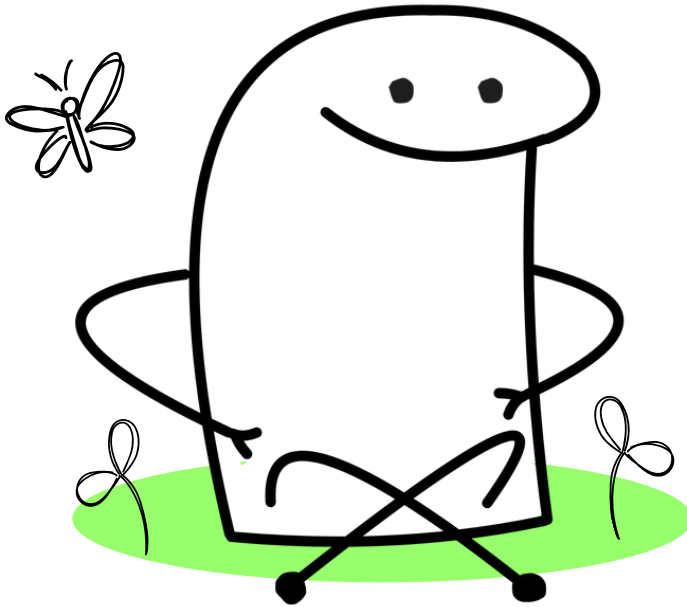
Tighten, tense, and squeeze all the muscles in your body at once by curling up into a ball. Hold then release.

4. Now with all your muscles relaxed, take a few more deep breaths. Notice the sensations in your body. If there are any areas of your body that still feel tense, tighten and relax just those muscles. Your body should feel looser and more relaxed after this exercise.

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Key Tip!

Because it is difficult to learn new things when we are feeling stressed, it's best to learn and practice new coping skills when you are feeling calm. Practice several times so you are prepared to use this skill when you need it.



Note:

You can even use progressive muscle relaxation at school or in other situations without anyone noticing. Focus on one or two muscle groups that no one will see, like tensing and relaxing your arms while you are wearing a jacket, or your toes in your shoes.

Additional information for caregivers

Younger Children

Adults can help teach younger kids to do progressive muscle relaxation by demonstrating the activity and using a metaphor like tightening their muscles to resemble stiff, uncooked noodles, and then relaxing them like soft, cooked noodles. It can also be easier for younger children to do multiple muscle groups or their entire body at once.

Adults

Coping skills like this one are helpful for adults as well. Practicing progressive muscle relaxation can help adults manage their own stress, while also modeling healthy stress management for their children.

