**Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

One of the body’s reactions to fear, anxiety, and stress is muscle tension. This can lead to muscle aches and pains, as well as feeling physically exhausted. Oftentimes we don’t even notice how our muscles become tight or tense. Perhaps you clench your jaw, tighten your shoulders, or furrow your brow when you get stressed. One method of reducing this tension is through a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation. In this exercise you progressively tense up and then release different muscles in your body, noticing the difference between the tension and relaxation. **Please note**: If you have any physical injuries to a particular muscle group, please just skip that muscle group and sit quietly until we move on. We do not want to exacerbate any injuries you have.

* First, find a relaxed comfortable position seated on a chair. Take off your shoes. Let your hands rest on your lap. If you want to, you can also close your eyes.
* Let’s start by making a fist with your right hand. Close your hand tightly so that you can feel the tension but not so much that you feel pain. Now hold it for 5 seconds. [silently do a count to 5]
* Now release your fist and relax the muscles, letting your hand fall to your lap and let the tension drip out of the ends of your fingertips. [Do this for 10 seconds] Feel the difference between the tension and relaxation.

**[Proceed in the same way through the remaining muscle groups below]**

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| **Right upper arm.** | Bring your RIGHT forearm up to your shoulder like you are making a muscle. |
| **Left hand** | Make a fist with your LEFT hand. |
| **Left upper arm** | Bring your LEFT forearm up to your shoulder like you are making a muscle. |
| **Forehead** | Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you are surprised by something. |
| **Eyes** | Squeeze your eyes shut tight. |
| **Mouth, jaw** | Open your mouth as wide as you can, like you are yawning. |
| **Neck** | Slowly tip your head back, as if you are looking up at the ceiling. |
| **Shoulders** | Tense your muscles in your shoulders by bringing them up towards your ears. |
| **Back** | Push your shoulder blades back as if you are trying to touch them together and so your chest is pushed out forward |
| **Chest, stomach** | Breathe in deeply, filling your chest up with air so that you extend your chest and stomach. |
| **Hips, buttocks** | Squeeze your buttocks/glutes. |
| **Right upper leg** | Tighten your RIGHT thigh. |
| **Right lower leg** | Pull your RIGHT toes back toward you. Release the tension if your leg starts to cramp. |
| **Right foot** | Curl your RIGHT toes downward. |
| **Left upper leg** | Tighten your LEFT thigh. |
| **Left lower leg** | Pull your LEFT toes back toward you. Release the tension if your leg starts to cramp. |
| **Left foot** | Curl your LEFT toes downward. |

* Take a few moments to just notice how you feel both in mind and body. If you have closed your eyes, open your eyes when you are ready and bring your focus back into the room.

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**Check in:**

* What did you notice about the difference between tense and relaxed muscles?
* How did it feel to do the exercise? Was there anything hard about this practice?
* How do you feel now as compared to when we started?

**Continuing practice:**

This practice can be used throughout your day. When you are sitting in class, sitting out at the beach, or just before bedtime. By using this practice regularly you will begin to more readily move your muscles from tension to relaxation. Also consider that you don’t have to do the full practice to get benefit—that is, if you notice that you are holding tension in a particular area of your body, simply tense up that muscle group for 5 seconds, and then release it, letting yourself feel the relaxation take over your muscle for 10 seconds.