

# PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION TRAINING

## EXERCISES THAT WILL INCREASE YOUR RELAXATION

These exercises will help you to relax, teaching you to calm your body when you feel anxious. The training works by you tensing and then relaxing groups of muscles. There are two reasons for relaxing in this way: firstly, when you are suffering from anxiety, tension becomes such a habit that you no longer notice it. These exercises make you aware of the differences between tension and relaxation. Secondly, by tensing a muscle we also fatigue it, and so make it easier to relax.

You will feel two physical sensations when doing these exercises: *Heaviness* and *Warmth*. These will show you that you are relaxing properly.

Learning these exercises involves three stages:

- Stage 1: Try and do all the exercises daily for 7 days. By the end of the week you should be very relaxed after each training session.
- Stage 2: Pick out the exercises that seem best for you and make up your own tailor-made program. The only exercise you should not leave out is the *deep breathing*. Continue to do this personalized training program daily.
- Stage 3: When you have reached Stage 2, begin trying to

apply relaxation '*bursts*' during the day. Do this by deep breathing, tensing your arms briefly, or just by mentally relaxing and allowing your body to follow. You can relax like this in almost any situation, at work, talking in company, while waiting in a queue, or even while walking.

Relaxation is a physical skill, just like learning to swim or to type. In order to stay good at it, you must practice Stages 2 and 3 regularly. Once you have learned this technique, you will be able to control anxiety in stressful situations by applying relaxation in '*bursts*', and relaxing fast will become easier.

*“Relaxation is a physical skill just like learning to swim of type”*

### Preparing for relaxation exercises

Choose a quiet time and place to practice. You may want to try the exercises at the same time as using your Neuromonics Device. Allow 10-15 minutes. Begin by lying on your back, or sitting comfortably in an armchair. Do not cross your arms or legs.

Breathe slowly and deeply and close your eyes.

Watch out for two common mistakes when you practice. Make sure firstly you do not TENSE UP TOO HARD. You should never cause pain or stiffening through using these exercises — if one particular exercise hurts you, leave it out. Secondly, try not to release tension slowly. RELAX SUDDENLY so that you notice the contrast between tension and relaxation.

### Relaxing Hands and Arms

Try to keep the rest of your body relaxed and then clench your right fist. Notice the tension in your fingers, your thumb, the palm of your hand, your knuckles and the back of your hand. Keep your fist clenched and notice the tension in your wrist and the lower part of your arm. Notice how clenching your fist makes your arm tense as well. Now, still concentrating, let your hand suddenly relax. Let your fingers hang and notice how they feel warm when you relax them. Notice also how your arm feels heavy. These feelings of heaviness and warmth are an important sign that you are succeeding in relaxing. Breathe slowly and concentrate on your right hand for a few seconds.

Next switch your attention to your left hand. Go through the same procedure as with your right. Clench your fist, concentrating to pinpoint all the different muscles which tense as you do this. Relax your left hand suddenly, and again try to notice feelings of heaviness and warmth. Let your breathing become slow and regular after each tension exercise. Both arms should feel heavy.

Now tense your right arm

*“try to release tension slowly”*

again by bending it up so that your knuckles touch your shoulder, clenching your fist at the same time. Hold it like this for a moment, and then let it drop. Repeat this exercise once for the left arm.

Lastly, hold your right arm straight in front of you and tense it up. Try to feel as if you are pushing your hand off the end of your arm, then draw your hand back and let your arm drop. Repeat this for your left arm. Remember when doing each exercise, try to keep the rest of your body relaxed, you should only need

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to tense each group of muscles one or twice.

### Relaxing Shoulders, Neck and Face

Now concentrate on the area around your shoulders and the upper parts of your arms, chest and back. Tense the muscles here by hunching up your shoulders. Hold them in that uncomfortable position and notice the muscle tension across the top of your shoulders, in your neck, in the top part of your chest and back, and in your arms. Notice how your breathing is affected by tensing these muscles. Then, quite suddenly let these muscles relax. Let your arms become soft and heavy again and let your shoulders slump as low as possible. Allow your breathing to become slow and regular again, and you feel much more comfortable. Your arms should still be heavy, and allow your shoulders to sag as low as possible.

Concentrate next on your neck muscles. Tense them by pushing your head back against the chair or pillow. Be careful not to tense too hard, push your head back only slightly. Notice the tension in the back of your neck, back of your head and across your shoulders. Notice the tension in the front of your neck and around your jaw and the lower part of your face. Now bring your head forward and suddenly let your muscles relax. Allow your head to drop forward and feeling floppy and heavy.

Your breathing should become slower and more regular. The next group of muscles are those in your face. Begin by frowning and creasing your forehead. Now add to the tension by closing your eyes as tightly as you can. Notice the feelings of tension you are producing, and then relax. Make your face tense again by pursing your lips and pressing your tongue against the roof of your mouth. Feel the tension in your cheeks then suddenly relax your face muscles. Notice the skin becoming soft as your forehead and cheeks return to normal and your jaw sags. Let your mouth remain slightly open. Your breathing once again should return to normal. Now your arms and your head should feel heavy, your shoulders are slumped and your face feels soft. Breathe slowly.

### Relaxing your Back and Stomach Muscles

Concentrate on the muscles in your back and produce tension by arching your back slightly. Hold the tension and try to notice where the muscles in your back are working. Suddenly let your back become soft and relaxed. Enjoy the contrast. Your breathing should slow. Next, tense your stomach muscles by pulling your stomach in so that you look as thin as possible. Hold it and concentrate on the tension. Gently let your stom-

ach return to normal and notice how comfortable you feel when the muscles across your stomach are soft and relaxed. Breathe slowly and regularly.

### The Breathing Exercise

This is the most important exercise of all. Try to completely relax and "let yourself go" all over, and concentrate on your breathing. Make sure that it is easy and regular. Inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. Take **four** deep breaths, filling your lungs as much

*"following this training you will become calmer, more confident, better able to handle the daily problems and stresses"*

as possible and then breathing out slowly. Return to breathing slowly and easily, notice how relaxed you feel.

### Relaxing your Feet and Legs

Concentrate on your right foot and right leg. Straighten your leg (if you are sitting in a chair keep your heel on the floor). Now point your toes down away from you. Curl your toes under. Feel the tension in your toes, the sole of your foot, the upper part of the foot and the ankle. Notice the tension in the lower part of your leg, in the calf muscles and behind your knees. Feel it in the front of your knee and in the thigh muscles, right up to the top

of the leg. Suddenly let your foot and leg relax. Your foot should feel soft and floppy and your leg heavy and lazy.

Now repeat this procedure with your left leg. Remember to concentrate as you tense and relax.

### Finishing a Relaxation Session

Your breathing should now very slow and gentle. Your arms, legs and head are heavy, your face, neck, shoulders and stomach are soft. Enjoy the changes you have produced. Now think "CALM" each time you breathe out.

Repeat this 10-20 times, saying "CALM" each time you exhale.

Finish the session gradually. Let your muscles get ready to move again as you think "THREE-TWO-ONE-AWAKE".

### The Benefit

Relaxation is a skill which all of us are capable of. By following this training you will become calmer, more confident, and better able to handle daily problems and stresses.

Adapted from notes of Keith E Smith, August 1992