

# Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) was developed by Dr Edmund Jacobson and published first in 1929. It is based on the premise that muscle tension increases significantly when feeling restless or anxious. Moving systematically from muscle group to muscle group in one's body, one first tenses muscles for a few seconds before relaxing them again and paying attention to how the muscles feel like when relaxed.

## PMR?

- PMR can help you relax.
- You do a series of exercises in which you tense up certain muscle groups as you breathe in, hold the tensing for a few seconds while you are breathing evenly and release the tension in your muscle as you breathe out.
- You focus on the transition from tension to relaxation.

## Before Starting the Exercise

- Try to sit or lie down comfortably: e.g. open or loosen a belt that is too tight.
- Take off your glasses beforehand.
- PMR is usually carried out with your eyes closed. If you find it difficult to keep your eyes closed, then leave them open and find a point in the room to fixate.
- Try not to be disturbed by noises from outside. In the relaxed state, stomach noises also occur. This is completely normal and should not bother anyone or be embarrassing.
- During the exercise you might feel your mind wandering. Do not try to get these thoughts away, just acknowledge you have them and move forward with the exercise!
- When tensing the muscles do not go beyond your pain limit. Tense up muscles gently and carefully and take care not to hurt yourself.

## What is the aim of PMR?

PMR is a behavioural technique for relaxation which derives from the observation that anxiety and muscle tension can reinforce each other. For a meta-analysis of potential health benefits, please see [Carlson & Hoyle \(1993\)](#).

## Who Should Not Use PMR?

People with particular diseases, for example

- severe asthma,
- cardiovascular conditions,
- epilepsy,
- acute psychosis,
- tendency to dissociate,
- hypochondriac disorder,
- muscular diseases

should first consult their doctor before trying to do PMR exercises.



## A Simple PMR Exercise

- There are many versions.
- Many versions start with a short breathing exercise or are combining PMR with other relaxing techniques.
- PMR lasts a few minutes up to one hour, depending on how many muscle groups are included.
- PMR can be done either sitting or lying.
- For better results try PMR at least once daily.

In the following, a short version is presented that you can try while sitting on a chair and that takes up to 5 minutes. After each exercise step, attend to how your body might feel differently:

- Scrunch your face (nose scrunched, frown, eyes closed, teeth together grinded) as you inhale, hold on for 5 seconds while you breathe evenly, then with the next long exhale, relax your face.
- Tense up your arms (lifted arms, balled fists) as you inhale, hold on for 5 seconds while you breathe evenly, with the next long exhale relax.
- Tense up your shoulders and chest (lifted tensed shoulder and upper chest) as you inhale, hold on for 5 seconds while you breathe evenly, with the next long exhale relax.
- Tense up your legs (lift your legs, toes facing towards you) as you inhale, hold on for 5 seconds while you breathe evenly, with the next long exhale relax.



## References and Resources

- You can try other versions of PMR in English or German with or without background music. For example (in German): [external video link](#)

### Further References:

- Berking, M. (2015). *Training emotionaler Kompetenzen* (3rd ed.). Springer-Verlag.
- Carlson, C. R., & Hoyle, R. H. (1993). *Efficacy of abbreviated progressive muscle relaxation training: A quantitative review of behavioral medicine research*. *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 61(6), 1059–1067.
- Jacobson, E. (1977). *The origins and development of progressive relaxation*. *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 8(2), 119–123.
- Mackereth, P. A., & Tomlinson, L. (2010). *Progressive muscle relaxation: a remarkable tool for therapists and patients*. *Integrative Hypnotherapy*, 82–96.



## Any Questions?

If you have further questions, please see the contact details for mental health support that are listed in our leaflet „[Mental Health Support](#)“, as well as the references and links in this document. Please note that while we select links to external websites carefully, we cannot guarantee for the accuracy or quality of these websites.