

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Patient Education: Side Effect and Symptom Management Series



Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a technique that relaxes the muscles in your body. It helps reduce tension or stress that you may hold in your muscles. When you let go of the tension, your muscles will relax. PMR is done by tensing and relaxing a muscle group off and on until the muscle stays relaxed. As you practice, you will learn to feel the difference between tense muscles and relaxed muscles.

Benefits of PMR

- Lower your stress
- Lower your heart rate
- Help you control your anxiety
- Reduce muscle tension
- Lessen your pain
- Help you feel more rested

How to Relax with PMR

1. Get into a comfortable position. You may stand, sit or lay down on your back.
2. Tighten all of the muscles in your face to make them tense. Hold the tension for 5-10 seconds.
3. Relax the muscles in your face for 15-20 seconds. Focus on the tension leaving your body.
4. Repeat tensing and relaxing the same muscles 2 –3 times before moving on to the next muscle group.
5. Repeat steps 2, 3, and 4 with different muscle groups.

In this order, focus on the shoulders, upper arms, forearms, hands, chest, back, trunk, thighs, lower legs and then feet.



Making the forearm muscles tense



Relaxing the forearm muscles

Helpful Hints

- PMR should not feel bad. Stop PMR if it is painful or not comfortable.
- Use long deep breaths to help relax the muscles.
- Keep your muscles relaxed longer than you keep them tense.
- Feeling warm and tingly is normal.

📞 **Call your UNC Recreational Therapy and Child Life team member if you have any questions.**

984-974-1000

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