

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION EXERCISE

You might have noticed that when you're stressed, you tend to store physical tension in your body. You might hunch your shoulders, clench your jaws, grind your teeth or form your hands into a tight grip. The idea with a physical relaxation technique is that if you can relax your body, your emotions will start to relax and unwind too, putting you in a better mood. Some people like to do this kind of exercise in the morning to start the day in a good frame of mind; others like to do it during their breaks to help them recharge. It's also a good technique to use during long-haul flights or last thing at night to help you get a restful sleep.

- Begin by following the steps for the deep-breathing exercise, until you've achieved the desired state of slow, deep and steady breathing. (For this exercise, you need to be lying down or sitting in a comfortable position, with your arms and legs in a relaxed state).
- Once you've got your breathing sorted, bring your focus to your feet. As you inhale, curl your toes and clench your feet, holding tightly for a few seconds. As you exhale, slowly release the tension in your feet, letting the muscles relax completely. Notice the feeling of warmth and weightlessness in that area.
- Next move up to your calves, tensing and stretching the muscles, maintaining the same steady breathing (no need to rush this). Then release. Continue following the same process for each part of the body: thighs, buttocks, stomach, hands (making a tight fist), arms, back, shoulders, neck and finally the face (you could opt to do several areas of the face: jaw, eyes, forehead—if no one can see you, feel free to pull lots of silly faces.) Each time, notice how relaxed and light the area becomes.

- Now that your whole body is relaxed, imagine that you're in a place all by yourself where you can feel completely at peace. This could be in a green field surrounded by flowers, or on the white shores of a stunning beach, or beside a gentle stream. Hear the soothing sounds and breathe in the fresh air, relaxing you even more.
- As you continue breathing, imagine that as you inhale you're breathing in goodness and calmness, and that it's filling your whole body. Then, as you slowly exhale, imagine that you're breathing out all the stress and negative emotions from your body, letting them fade into the air around you.
- Continue in this state of relaxation for as long as you wish. When you're ready to stop, slowly count down from five to one, and then gently open your eyes. Get up from your position smoothly and calmly, ready to carry on with your day.