

Progressive Relaxation

Technique is based on the assumption that the body responds to anxiety-provoking thoughts and events with muscle tension. This physiological tension, in turn increases feelings of anxiety. Deep muscle relaxation reduces physiological tension and is incompatible with anxiety.

Most people do not realise which of their muscles are chronically tense. Progressive relaxation provides a way of identifying particular muscles and muscle groups and distinguishing between sensations of tension and muscle relaxation. Each muscle or muscle grouping is tensed from 5-7 seconds and then relaxed for 20-30 seconds.

Expect to relax

It is important that you develop a positive expectation that you will relax. There is little use in shouting to yourself "relax dammit" instead try saying calmly "I am going to relax now." Relaxation is a passive process which must be practised. Trying too hard will only complicate the process. Just sit back and let it happen.

Make yourself comfortable

Get in a comfortable position, loosen any tight clothing, unfasten tight shoelaces and remove glasses if they are heavy.

Basic procedure

All you are asked to do is to focus upon the muscles mentioned and allow them to release as much tension as possible. It might be helpful to allow the muscle to become warm or even heavy – any state which you feel is associated with relaxation. Take care when tensing muscles in neck and back and in toes.

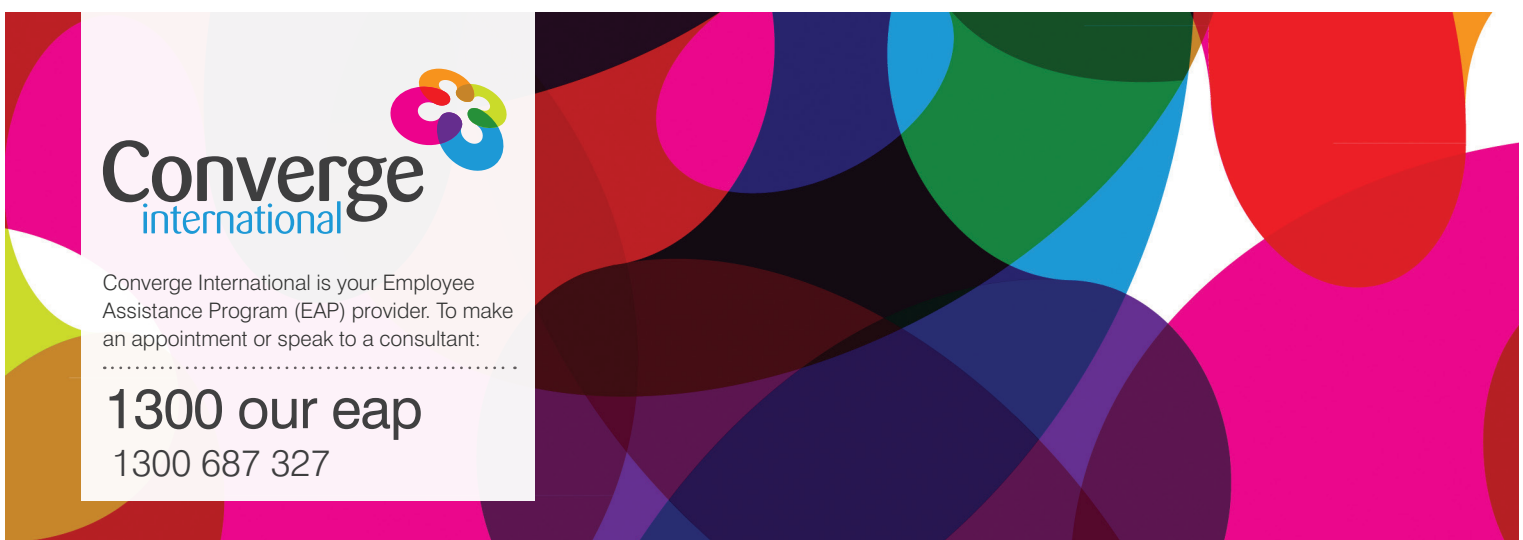
Clench your right fist, tighter and tighter, noticing the tension as you do. Keep it clenched and notice the tension in your fist, hand and arm. Now relax. Feel the looseness in your right hand and notice the contrast with the tension. Now clench your left fist, and then relax it, feeling the difference between tenseness and relaxation.

Now **tense your arms** as hard as you can and observe the feeling of tenseness. Now relax your arms, both of them together. Feel the tension flowing in waves down your arms and out through your fingers. Your arms feel more loose and relaxed with each breath out.

Next **tense your toes and feet**. Notice the tension, and then relax. Tense your calves. Relax again. Tighten your thighs and buttocks. Relax again. Letting the tension go more and more with each breath out, leaving your legs very loose and relaxed warm and relaxed.

Now **focus on your abdominal muscles**, tighten, and then relax. Now your chest muscles. Feel them become looser and relaxed with each breath out. Now your back muscles. Feel them sinking into the chair, just further and further down. More and more relaxed.

Focus upon your forehead muscles, just above your eyebrows. Feel them become relaxed and smooth. Now down to your eyebrows..... very relaxed. Your cheeks and mouth muscles..... very loose..... very relaxed. Your jaw muscles, letting your lower jaw drop open as it wishes. Now your neck muscles front and back, letting them become warm and loose and very relaxed. Now let your shoulders drop as much as they want. Notice that your forehead, scalp, eyes, mouth and jaw are all relaxed. Feel the relaxation spreading through your neck, throat and shoulders. Deeper and deeper. Let the tension flow away. Feeling very relaxed, calm and relaxed.



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Now scan over your body to check if any muscles are still tense. Tense then relax them. Now **tighten your whole body** and let your breath out at the same time. Relax everything and as you breathe out imagine all the tension going out of your body (slow not necessarily deep breathing).

With your eyes still closed; let your mind drift back in time. Think of a nice relaxing situation. Don't push your mind, but when you have a picture of a relaxing place in your mind, take a picture of that place as you would with a camera. Hold it in your mind – it will gradually dissolve and when it does, go back to focusing on your breathing. Move between the picture and the breathing. (If it's taking a long time to develop a picture, think of where you'd like to go to be relaxed. Get a picture of yourself of how you'd like to be – maybe up in the bush or down at the beach – sights, sounds, feel, smell.) (Allow about 5 minutes.)

With your eyes closed, take nice deep breath, feel the air coming into your lungs and feel it refreshing you. When you're ready in your own time, come back from where you are and slowly open your eyes.



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