

Stress Management and Mindfulness

Progressive Relaxation – INSTRUCTOR SCRIPT

Before we begin our “Progressive Relaxation” technique, be sure to find a quiet place away from distractions like telephones and grocery lists. Get comfortable in your favorite chair, or even in a reclining position, if that suits you today. Once you get there, you can shift around a bit until you find a place that feels good to your body – a position that makes you feel that you can be calm and still.

Progressive relaxation can be done any time you feel anxious or stressed, or if you feel the need for better mental focus. It will help you feel more “present” - relaxing your body & bringing more clarity of mind and mental focus.

This mindfulness technique can also be helpful if you are having a challenging time getting to sleep or staying asleep. If this is the case, get comfortable in bed and begin to mindfully scan your body, looking for areas that might be holding tension, paying attention to and slowing down your breath until it's unhurried, even and comfortable.

Let's take a few moments to practice mindfulness together.

Mindfully, begin to roll the shoulders back and down a few times, noticing – do you feel any tension in the shoulders and neck? Slowly shrug the shoulders up - squeezing them as high as possible - before sliding them back and down. After you shrug slowly another time or two, feel the shoulder blades slide down on the back and squeeze them slightly toward each other until you feel the chest begin to open and stretch. Then relax, maintaining the openness of the chest - with the shoulder blades lying flat on the back ribs.

Notice your breath. Begin to slow your breathing –allow it to be effortless and comfortable. Let's begin to even it out, drawing the breath into the very lowest part of the belly. Inhaling – feeling the belly get round and full, and then exhaling, noticing the belly button move toward the spine.

Let's take a few easy breaths counting to four with each exhale - and then again counting to four as you inhale.

Now - bring your focus to your feet, feel the relaxing energy melt from the tips of the toes - through the arch – to the heels. Drawing that softness up through the ankles - lower legs – rising through the thighs. Take just a moment to relax the thighs completely, feeling the heaviness of the legs and feet.

Let's bring the focus back to the breath, paying attention to the movement of your belly. The abdominal muscles are relaxed – the breath moving in & out of the belly without effort and without tension.

As you begin to bring focus to the lower back, imagine heat and warmth melting any tightness or tension there – unknotting the muscles. Bring the warmth and relaxation through the mid-back - then up to the shoulders.

Purposefully relax the shoulders. Feel the arms grow heavier as you think about relaxing the upper arm – the forearm – even the hands, allowing the fingers to curl.

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Gently nod the head, tucking the chin slightly until you feel length in the back of the neck. If you'd like, you can lift your head back up until the chin is parallel to the floor, relaxing the jaw, the base of the tongue, through the bridge of the nose and the forehead. Even the scalp feels relaxed.

Take a few moments to scan back through the body – from the feet to the crown of the head – looking for areas of stress, tightness or tension in the muscles. If you find any tension, focus on relaxing and releasing the contraction or tightness as you exhale.

With each exhalation we get heavier, sinking toward the ground. Inhaling and exhaling slowly and comfortably.

Begin to wiggle your fingers and toes – shifting until your body begins to come back to wakefulness. When you are ready, open your eyes with a smile, feeling less stress and tension in your body and more focus and clarity in your mind.

Remember, if you have trouble going to sleep, or staying asleep, it can be helpful to perform a mental scan of your body to release any tension in your muscles. You can also perform progressive relaxation in a different way, by using this same body scan method, but first tensing a specific muscle group - then relaxing that same muscle group before progressing on to the next. Just make sure to breathe evenly and comfortably throughout the entire session.

The more you practice, the quicker your body will be to respond and relax.