

Smith Center for Healing & the Arts

Progressive Relaxation

Shanti Norris

Preparation

Prepare the area for the relaxation. Put a sign on the door or let people know not to disturb you for 20 minutes or half an hour. Take the phone off the hook (The world really can wait while you relax and recharge, better able to take up your duties soon enough.). If possible, have the temperature warmer, rather than cooler, as your body temperature drops when your body metabolism slows down in the relaxation process. Have a blanket nearby to cover yourself if you like.

1. Lie flat on your back, placing the legs about shoulder-width apart. Arms should be comfortably alongside the body with the palms turned up. Close your eyes. You can gently move the different parts of the body to “settle in” to a comfortable position.

2. Go through the body part-by-part, first thinking of that part of the body, tense it, hold it in full tension for a few seconds and then release. Begin with the legs, one at a time. As you hold the right leg in full tension, raise it just an inch or two off the floor, squeeze and release, letting the leg drop back to the floor. Roll it gently from side to side and then leave it to rest, forgetting about it. Repeat this process with the left leg, then with the arms, one at a time.

Next, bring the mind to the buttocks and pelvic area. Tense them, hold and then relax. Do this twice. Now, become aware of the abdominal area. Inhale through the nose and hold the air in the abdomen, letting it expand, and push out. Hold the breath only as long as comfortable, and then release the air with a gush out of the open mouth, feeling that the muscles of the abdomen and diaphragm are completely relaxed. Bring your awareness up to the chest and lung area. Inhale fully once again, this time expanding the chest area, holding the air in the chest area. Hold for five seconds, and release suddenly through the mouth, feeling that the muscles of the chest and thorax are relaxed.

Move up to the shoulders. Allow the arms to remain on the floor, squeeze the shoulders up and forward, as though they could meet at the chin. Hold for a few seconds and release. Do this a second time, or squeeze the shoulders up towards the top of the head, hold and release.

Coming to the face and head, squeeze all the muscles of the face in towards the nose, making a prune face. Hold for a few seconds and release. Now open the face wide, raising the forehead, mouth open, stretching the muscles of the face open and back. And release. Roll the head gently from side to side and let it come back to the middle and rest.

3. Now you have relaxed all the muscles of the body. Next use the mind to review the body part-by-part. Wherever the mind goes, let it bring a wave of relaxation there. Begin at the toes and come all the way up to the head, covering every part. If you find any tension in any part of the body, mentally concentrate on this part and tell it to relax. If you do this mentally, without moving any muscles, you will find that the body does what you tell it to. At the end, just visualize your body resting in front of you - as though watching yourself sleep.

4. Bring your awareness to your breath. Simply be aware of, or watch your own breathing, moving freely in and out. The breath may be very shallow, very relaxed. Just remain the witness of your own breathing.

5. Shift your attention to observe the mind and any thoughts that flow through it. You don't need to do anything, or change anything, simply neutrally witness the thoughts, as though you were watching a movie or show - without getting involved in the thoughts or images. You remain the peaceful, unaffected witness.

Rest for at least 5 minutes in this peaceful state. You will recharge your body, and when done deeply, it can be as refreshing and energizing as several hours of sleep.

6. When you are ready to come out of the relaxation, do so slowly. Begin to deepen the breath slightly. You can mentally go back through the body, and imagine fresh energy entering into each part, starting from the top of the head and going downwards to the feet and toes. If you want to do a healing visualization, you can mentally see healing light energy or feel warmth or tingling in each part of the body, as you go through it. As you wake up each part, mentally see an inner source of healing springing to life in every part, every organ and cell of the body, so that ultimately, you can visualize a current of light or energy or warmth circulating unimpeded through the system, joining every part and bringing vitality and energy to every cell. You can visualize a luminescent body of flowing energy, and imagine that this is always going on, bring health, oxygen, nutrition and vitality through the system.

Gently roll the arms and then the legs from side to side.

Slowly sit up and enjoy the feeling of being refreshed and peaceful.

Quick Review:

1. Prepare the room.
2. Lie down in savaasana (corpse pose). **Physically tense and relax** the body part by part, beginning with the feet and hands.
3. **Mentally relax the body** part by part, without physically moving any part.
4. **Watch the breath.**
5. **Watch the mind.**
6. Slowly come out of the relaxation by **mentally going back through the body**, bringing fresh energy and vitality wherever the mind goes.

The same steps can be done sitting in a chair if you are not comfortable lying down or if you want to quickly recharge in your office.