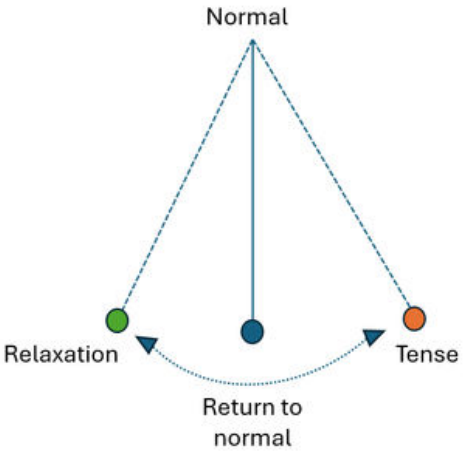
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

The technique of PMR was described by Edmund Jacobson in the 1930's based on the idea that mental calmness is a natural result of physical relaxation.

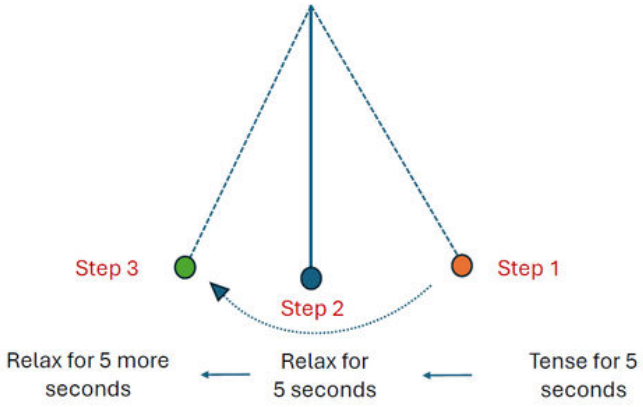
By tensing and tightening one muscle group at a time, followed by a relaxation phase, we can release held tension. Like a pendulum pulled 45° in one direction it goes 45° in the opposite. In theory, the more you tense a muscle, the more you get the opposite experience of relaxation.



What is it useful for?

PMR has many benefits but is most commonly used as a way to help with stress management, anxiety relief, insomnia, headaches, phobias, digestion issues and to help with blood pressure issues.

The process is a simple combination of tensing for a few seconds and then doubling the relaxation period. The most difficult part of PMR can be finding a quiet space to do it, and then, just like learning any new skill. the more we practice and engage with the exercises, the greater the benefit we will receive.



What is happening?

When we feel stressed or tense, our fight, flight, freeze response is triggered and we release Adrenalin, Cortisol and Norepinephrine to help our body respond.

Progressive muscle relaxation uses these chemicals so that less of them "hang around" in our system. As a result, we return balance and can deal with the threat more logically and less emotionally.

If someone is just getting started with PMR, they may find it helpful to:

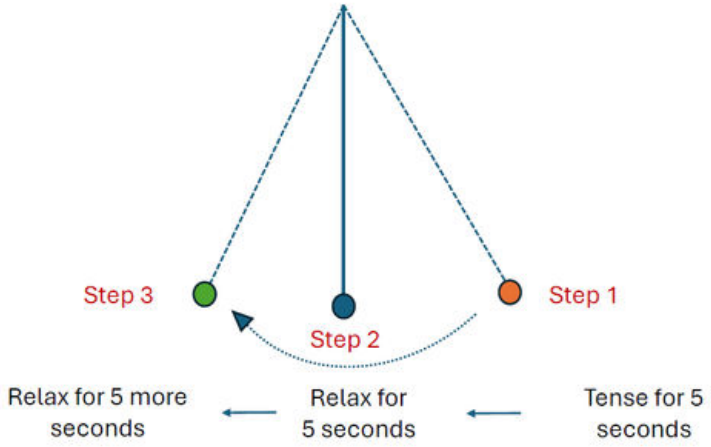
- Set aside a regular time each day for PMR, such as before sleep
- Choose a quiet, calm space in which to practice
- Use audio or video tutorials to guide the process
- Listen to relaxing music
- Practice consistently to establish a routine

Your Toolkit

The exercises should be pain free. If you feel any discomfort when doing them step back a little. Avoid any muscle groups that may be injured.

You can either move through all the groups, or focus on a specific area of the body.

- Lower arms and hands: Hold both arms out over your lap and make a fist with both hands.
- Upper arms: Bring both arms to your shoulders and flex your biceps.
- Calves: Extend your legs in front of you and point your toes towards your knees.
- Lower legs: Extend your legs in front of you and point your toes away from your knees.
- Thighs: Extend your legs in front of you and press your thighs together tightly.
- Stomach: Draw your stomach in tightly, try to touch the small of your back to the back of the chair
- Chest: Take a deep breath and hold it in, if comfortable try to touch your elbows together behind your back.
- Shoulders: Draw your shoulders up to your ears.
- Neck: Touch your chest with your chin.
- Lips: Press your lips tightly together without clamping down with your jaw or biting your teeth.
- Eyes: Close your eyes tight and scrunch up your nose.
- Jaw: Open your mouth as wide as possible.
- Lower forehead: Pout and lower your eyebrows.
- Upper forehead: Wrinkle your brow and raise your eyebrows



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Because Minds Matter