

## Progressive Relaxation

If it's hard for you to simply *command* your body to relax, you may do better with *Progressive Relaxation*. During Progressive Relaxation, you first contract your muscles, then release, or relax, the muscle group. If you sometimes have trouble with spontaneous relaxation, give the exercise below a try.

- *Stretch out on the floor, in a chair, on the couch or on your bed. Get as comfortable as possible, and close your eyes if you are able.*
- *Breathe deeply and bring your focus to your face.*
- *Squinch or crumple your face as tightly as possible and hold the pose for 3 seconds (count to 3 silently). At the end of the 3-count, breathe deeply and relax your face.*
- *Contract your shoulders as tightly as possible (touch your ears to your shoulders) and hold the pose for 3 seconds (count to 3 silently). At the end of the 3-count, breathe deeply and relax your shoulders.*
- *Contract your arms as tightly as possible (pull your fists into your shoulders, flexing the biceps) and hold the pose for 3 seconds (count to 3 silently). At the end of the 3-count, breathe deeply and relax your arms by stretching them out straight in front of you.*
- *Contract your buttocks as tightly as possible (squeeze the gluts as if they were trying to hold a penny between your cheeks!) and hold the pose for 3 seconds (count to 3 silently). At the end of the 3-count, breathe deeply and relax your buttocks.*
- *Contract your legs as tightly as possible (straighten your legs out in front of you, flexing the feet back towards you) and hold the pose for 3 seconds (count to 3 silently). At the end of the 3-count, breathe deeply and relax your legs.*
- *Contract your feet as tightly as possible (curl your toes down, as if to make a ball with the feet) and hold the pose for 3 seconds (count to 3 silently). At the end of the 3-count, breathe deeply and relax your feet. If you get a foot cramp, simply stretch your feet back towards the body and breathe deeply.*
- *Finally, take a deep belly breath and exhale with vigor. Follow this with a deep inhale, and a slow exhale.*

*How did this form of relaxation work for you?*

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*Was it easier to relax by engaging the muscles to do so?*

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