

# Stress Management

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

Our bodies respond to stress with muscular tension. It is thought to be the most common symptom of stress. PMR is a stress management technique that allows us to recognize and relieve this tension by contracting and then relaxing specific muscle groups in a systematic way. Concentrating on the technique also frees our minds from the problems or situations that caused the stress.

### How is it done?

- Begin by getting into a comfortable position and do a few minutes of deep breathing.
- Next, tighten a specific muscle group for about 5 to 10 seconds. Then quickly release the tension and relax the muscles for 15 to 30 seconds.
- Be aware of the differences in the two different sensations.
- You will be working on tensing and relaxing these muscle groups in a specific order. Some people start at the feet and work up while others start at the head and work down. Do whichever feels most comfortable to you. Here is a suggested order:
  - Right foot, Right lower leg and foot, Entire right leg
  - Left foot, Left lower leg and foot, Entire left leg
  - Right hand, Right forearm and hand, Entire right arm
  - Left hand, Left forearm and hand, Entire left arm
  - Face
  - Neck and shoulders
  - Abdomen

End the session by again taking a few minutes to relax, deep breathe and enjoy yourself. Open your eyes and do a few stretches. Wiggle your toes and fingers. You should feel refreshed!

The best way to learn this technique is to practice it on a daily basis! Plan to do PMR twice per day. Each session takes about 10 to 15 minutes.



## **Some other helpful hints**

- Find a quiet place to do the exercise without music or interruptions.
- Keep the lights low.
- Wear loose clothing and take off your shoes.  
It is best to do PMR before eating. Also avoid smoking and drinking.
- Do not hold your breath during the exercises. Get into the habit of breathing in while you tense a muscle and breathing out while you release the tension.
- Here are a few specific suggestions on tightening muscle groups. To tense your hand, make a fist. When tensing your facial muscles, squeeze your eyes shut. You can also clench your teeth and pull back the corners of your mouth. Shrug up your shoulders and pull them into your neck to tense that muscle group.
- Use PMR to fall asleep at night.
- As you perfect your technique, you will learn to quickly recognize the feeling of tension and stress building in your muscles and then be able to quickly release it on command.