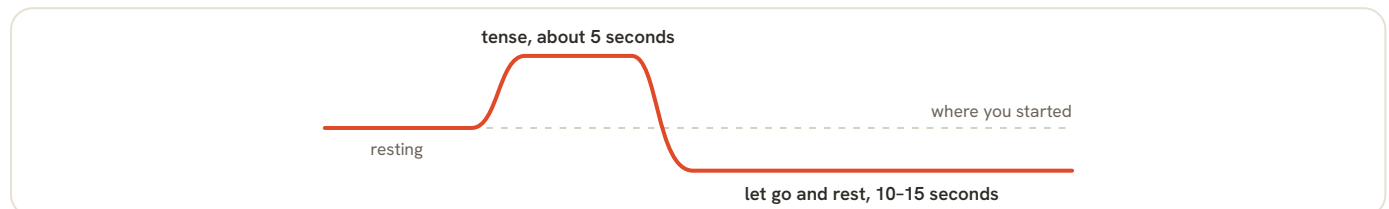


Tense and let go

Progressive muscle relaxation

When we're anxious, muscles tighten without our noticing. Tensing a muscle on purpose and then letting it go helps you feel the difference, and the letting go often goes further than where you started.



How

- Sit or lie down somewhere quiet. Allow 10–15 minutes.
- For each area, breathe in and tighten the muscles for about five seconds: firmly, but at no more than half your strength.
- Breathe out and let go all at once. Rest for 10–15 seconds, noticing the difference: heavier, warmer, softer.
- Go gently with any area that's injured or sore, or leave it out. Stop if anything cramps or hurts.

The order

- 1 **Hands:** make fists.
- 2 **Arms:** bend your elbows and tighten your upper arms.
- 3 **Shoulders:** lift them up towards your ears.
- 4 **Face:** screw up your eyes and nose, and press your lips together.
- 5 **Neck:** gently press your head back into the chair or pillow.
- 6 **Chest and back:** draw your shoulder blades together.
- 7 **Stomach:** tighten it, as if bracing.
- 8 **Hips and thighs:** squeeze your buttocks and thighs.
- 9 **Lower legs and feet:** gently pull your toes up towards you.

To finish, rest for a minute or two and let your whole body be heavy. Then move your fingers and toes, open your eyes, and sit up slowly.

As it becomes familiar

Combine areas: arms and hands together, then face and neck, then the body, then the legs. Later you can leave out the tensing altogether: scan for tightness and simply let it go. That version works anywhere, including in bed when sleep won't come.

Progressive muscle relaxation was first described by the physician Edmund Jacobson in 1929; this is a shortened form. If you have a health condition or injury and aren't sure about it, check with your doctor first.