



Complementary methods to help you sleep: Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Troubled mind, tired body, stressed out, fear, anxiety, exams, projects, travelling & jetlag, are common in our lives making falling asleep and sleeping well sometimes a problem. Nothing feels more defeating than checking the time in the dark and realizing you haven't been able to sleep yet another night. And instead of falling asleep you realize your mathematical abilities have improved. Sleep is an existential necessity for maintaining health, performance and safety. An occasional night without sleep is not dangerous it may affect our daily routine, however chronic lack of sleep affects our overall health in many ways. Read more [The Art of Sleep](#)

Sleep issues tend to be one of the most common symptoms that accompanies stress and anxiety. According to the American Sleep Association, about 50-70 million American adults have some type of sleep disorder with insomnia being the most common. There are a number of complementary methods and practices that can help the body relax in order to be able to enter into deep sleep. Some of these techniques are [Aromatherapy](#), visualization, Progressive Muscle Relaxation and [Tapping](#).

What is Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- A method used to relieve the tension if you are having trouble falling asleep, when your body is physically relaxed, which may help you sleep better.
- It helps calm the mind if racing thoughts are keeping you from sleeping, focusing on doing this exercise helps relax the mind.
- Is safe and beneficial for most people, the required tensing of muscles can be uncomfortable if you have chronic pain.





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Prepare to sleep

- Before going to bed, avoid caffeine, your computer, phone or anything else that stimulates your mind or body.
- Take a bath, meditate, pray, do some exercises to help induce sleep like gentle stretches, yoga, breathing exercises, drink some herbal tea, listen to relaxing music
- Once in bed in vision places, thoughts, feelings, ideas that make you relax
- Start the exercise of tensing and releasing your muscles as follows:
 - You must focus on each selected muscle group in your body, first tensing for a few seconds and then slowly relaxing them
 - **Tense** muscle groups in an order as you breathe in, then **Relax** them as you breathe out.
 - Start with short intervals, Tension 5 Release 10, building to 10 to 30 seconds.
 - As with any new technique, progressive muscle relaxation takes some time to master
 - A session would take about 10-15 minutes.
- As you tense concentrate on your breath and as you release say calming words to yourself such: I am safe, I am joyful, I enjoy the calm and peace that I have, I am becoming a more relaxed.
- If you should wake up in the middle of the night, tell yourself its ok. Bring up your comforting images and again start tensing and releasing your muscles until you relax into sleep. Focus on bringing in relaxation to the present moment and releasing/letting go of any tension or racing thoughts keeping you awake.
- If you can't manage to sleep for more than 20 minutes, you need to reset. Get up, go to another room, and do a quiet, soothing activity, like applying oil/cream on your face and hands, meditate, read a book, or sip a cup of chamomile or herbal tea. Keep the lights dim to remind your body that it's still nighttime and avoid using your phone, tablet, laptop, or TV screen. Avoid checking the time as it may add to the stress of not being able to sleep. Your goal is to be mindful and concentrate on the present moment and letting go of tension or racing thoughts that are keeping you awake. Once you give yourself a break, return to bed, bring to mind your resource images from above, and tense and release your muscles again..





Progressive Muscle Relaxation Guide:

- Lie down quietly
- Breathe steadily: inhale with the tension, exhale with the release
- Progress in order (head to toe/ toe to head):

Face Lift your eyebrows to wrinkle your forehead Breathe out slowly relax and let the tension out of your forehead. Close your eyes tightly and then relax and slowly open them. Tense your lips, cheeks, and jaw muscles by grimacing, release and feel serenity cover your face as you relax all your facial muscles at once.

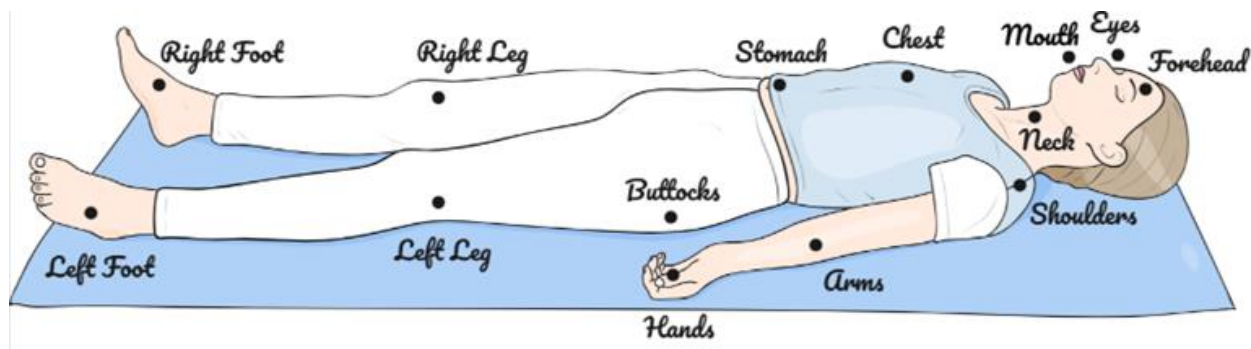
Shoulders & arms Bring your shoulders toward your ears, tensing your muscles, and then slowly let them relax. Starting with your upper arms, flex your biceps, and then relax, letting the tension out of your muscles. Tense your forearms, and then slowly let them relax.

Chest & abdomen Take a deep breath and tense the muscles within your chest and abdomen, and then slowly exhale as you relax these muscles.

Back Flex the muscles in your back as you arch them on the floor or bed, and then relax and let the stress and tension go out of your back muscles.

Hips & buttocks Tighten the muscles in your hips and buttocks, and then slowly release the tension and feel the stress leaving this area of your body.

Legs & feet Flex your leg muscles, squeezing your legs together, and then slowly relax. Flex your feet for a few seconds, and then relax them. Curl your toes, and then slowly let them return to neutral. After you have systematically tightened and relaxed all the muscle groups in your body, you should feel relaxed and calm.





Words for the Wise: Secrets to sleeping well

1. Exercise Boosts the effect of natural sleep hormones such as melatonin, people who exercised had an easier time falling asleep. Just watch the timing of your workouts. Exercising too close to bedtime can be stimulating. A morning workout is ideal. Exposing yourself to bright daylight first thing in the morning will help the natural circadian rhythm.
2. Reserve bed for sleep. It is not an office: no phone calls, emails, no late-night TV there. your bed needs to be a stimulus for sleeping not for wakefulness.
3. Keep bedroom comfortable, calm, quite, dark, cool in the summer and warm in winter
4. Start a sleep ritual When you were a child and your mother read you a story and tucked you into bed every night, this comforting ritual helped put you to sleep. Even now, bedtime rituals can have a similar effect as they signal the body and mind that it's time to sleep. Drink a glass of warm milk, chamomile, take a bath, listen to calming music to unwind
5. Eat, but not too much A grumbling stomach can be distracting enough to keep you awake, but so can an overly full belly. Avoid eating a big meal within two to three hours of bedtime. If you're hungry right before bed, eat a small healthy snack (such as an apple with a slice of cheese or a few whole-wheat crackers) to satisfy you until breakfast.
6. Avoid alcohol and caffeine If you have a snack before bed, wine and chocolate shouldn't be part of it. Chocolate contains caffeine, which is a stimulant. Alcohol has a similar effect. You may think it makes you sleepy, but it's actually a stimulant and disrupts sleep. Stay away from acidic food (such as citrus fruits and juices) or spicy, which can give you heartburn.
7. De-stress Stress is a stimulus. It activates the fight-or-flight hormones that work against sleep. Give yourself time to wind down before bed, journaling, breathing exercises, tapping, essential oils, bedtime exercises and meditation.
8. Sleep and Nap like a Pro. Eight quality-sleep hours and a short power nap in the afternoon have numerous benefits



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