

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation teaches you how to effectively relax your muscles. This can help you ease your pain after surgery.

It's common to have pain after surgery. When you have pain, muscles often contract. This is one of the ways your body tries to protect you. If your muscles remain tight and don't relax, they can cause you more pain than you had before.

When you use this relaxation tool before surgery, it can help you become aware of tension in your body. With this information, after surgery, you can use this tool to relax your muscles. This can help you avoid worsening pain.

Muscle relaxation can be practiced while sitting or lying down comfortably.

HOW TO DO THIS

Before you begin, ask a member of your surgical team if you should not use progressive muscle relaxation near the site of surgery. If you are told to avoid the surgical area, focus your muscle relaxation in other body areas.

- 1 Lie in a comfortable position. Support your head and neck as needed. You may wish to position a pillow under your knees for support.
- 2 Before you begin, notice the weight of your body. Take 5 slow, deep breaths. Each time you exhale, think about feeling "heavy" as you lie still.
- 3 After these soothing breaths, turn your focus to a body area that is far away from the surgical area. Tighten all of the muscles in that area for 5 to 10 seconds. This is also called contracting your muscles. While you do this, continue to breathe slowly and deeply. Avoid holding your breath. This breathing helps keep the rest of your body relaxed.
- 4 After you hold the muscle contraction for 5 to 10 seconds, exhale and release your tight muscles. **Repeat this process 2 to 3 times in this body area.** Notice the difference between the muscles when they are contracted and when they are relaxed.
- 5 Move to the next nearby body area. Repeat the 5 slow, deep breaths and the contract-and-relax muscle practice. See steps 3 and 4.
- 6 Eventually work your muscle contract-relax locations towards the surgical area. You may initially need to avoid contracting muscles in the surgical area. Your goal is to release the muscles in the area around the surgical area, so they don't stay tight and cause you increased pain.

PRACTICE

As with any skill, your ability to relax will improve with practice. You may not feel better right away. But try to practice 20 to 30 minutes every day. As your skills improve, you can shorten your practice sessions.

In time, you will notice when your muscles are tight. In those moments, it should take just a few contract-and-relax repetitions in that area, along with slow, easy breathing, to help your muscles relax.

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Often, people don't feel muscle tension until it causes pain. With practice, you will be able to more-quickly notice when you have muscle tension.

Pick a time of day when you are most alert. Don't practice when you are tired unless this is an effort to help you fall asleep.

Close your eyes or let them focus softly on an object across the room. This helps reduce distractions.

Change your position when needed for comfort.

OTHER RESOURCES

You may want to watch a video or listen to a CD or tape to guide you as you learn how to do this. Look for relaxation products at bookstores, local yoga and meditation studios or online.

- **Video:** [How to do Progressive Muscle Relaxation](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nZEdqcGVzo) [youtube.com/watch?v=1nZEdqcGVzo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1nZEdqcGVzo)
- **Video:** [Relaxation Progressive Muscle](https://www.mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC7194-05) [mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC7194-05](https://www.mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC7194-05)
- **Video:** [Progressive Muscle Relaxation](https://www.mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC5719-01) [mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC5719-01](https://www.mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC5719-01)
- **Video:** [Relaxation Passive Muscle](https://www.mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC7194-04) [mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC7194-04](https://www.mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC7194-04)
- **Handout:** [Using Relaxation Skills to Relieve Your Symptoms](https://www.mayoclinic.org/bedside/ope/GNT-20324209.html) [sharedfiles.mayoclinic.org/bedside/ope/GNT-20324209.html](https://www.mayoclinic.org/bedside/ope/GNT-20324209.html)
- **Video:** [Relaxation and Relaxed Breathing](https://www.mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC7698-10) [mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC7698-10](https://www.mayoclinic.org/pe?mc=MC7698-10)
- **Relaxed Breathing Apps:** Calm, Breathe