

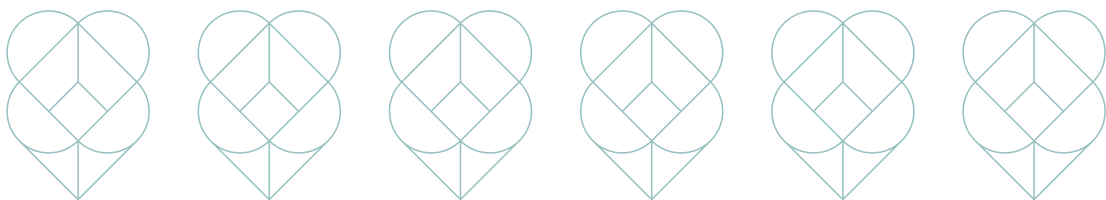
Progressive Muscle Relaxation

“Years as a healer and trauma therapist have taught me that trauma isn’t destiny. The body, not the thinking brain, is where we experience most of our pain, pleasure, and joy, and where we process most of what happens to us. It is also where we do most of our healing, including our emotional and psychological healing. And, it is where we experience resilience and a sense of flow.” — Resmaa Menakem

What to do:

- Find a comfortable seat on a chair or a cushion.
- Sit up straight while allowing your belly to soften.
- Curl your toes. Hold for five seconds. Then release.
- Tighten your calf muscles. Hold for five seconds. Then release.
- Gradually and one by one, tighten and release all the skeletal muscles in your body that you can consciously control.
- Feel the relaxation that happens as you release from the hold.

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Why it is worth doing:

This exercise uses isometric (non-moving) muscle tightening progressively throughout the body. We often don't even realize that we are tensing small muscles all the time. It's our body's way of creating stability and homeostasis (balance). But, because of emotions and stressors, we don't realize that our bodies get stuck in holding patterns without letting go. This exercise is about increasing that tension in order to fully feel the muscles relax and let go. Ultimately, your whole body gets released.

If you have more time:

Write down how you feel at the beginning. Note any body sensations you have. Notice any discomfort you're feeling. After the exercise, write again. This time notice what has changed. Notice which parts are resistant to letting go. Notice if you have an overall sense of calm afterward.

This is a great in-the-moment stress-relieving technique. If you find yourself tensing during the day, increase that tension to the point of tightness and then let it all go.

