



Relaxation Exercise: Using Muscle Tension to Learn to Relax



This method involves first tightening and then releasing the muscles throughout your body. You will do the following twice for each part of your body: (a) tense the muscle group, (b) hold and study the tension for 5 seconds, then (c) relax the muscles for 20 seconds, noticing the difference in feeling. It's very important to pay attention to the difference between the feeling of tension and the feeling of relaxation. After tensing and relaxing twice, move on to the next muscle group.

- **Hands.** Tighten your right hand by making a fist and squeezing. Do this twice. Repeat with the left hand.
 - **Forearms and back of hands.** With your right arm resting on a chair, and the back of your hand facing up, bend your hand at the wrist, pointing your fingers straight up. Study the tension this creates in the back of your hand and forearm. Repeat. Now do it with the left hand and arm.
 - **Biceps.** Flex the large muscles in your upper arm by trying to touch your right shoulder with your right fist, tightening the biceps. Repeat. Right arm first, then left.
 - **Shoulders.** Bring your shoulders up, as if to touch your ears with them. Repeat.
 - **Forehead.** Wrinkle your forehead by bringing your eyebrows as far as they will go. Repeat.
 - **Face.** Wrinkle your nose and close your eyes tightly. Repeat.
 - **Lips.** Press your lips tightly together. Repeat
 - **Tongue.** Push your tongue into the roof of your mouth. Repeat
 - **Neck.** Press your head against the back of the chair. Repeat.
 - **Chest.** Take a breath that is so deep you can feel it stretch your chest muscles. Hold it. Release it slowly. Feel yourself relax as the air leaves your lungs. Relax and repeat.
 - **Stomach.** Suck in and tighten your abdomen, as though preparing to receive a punch in the stomach. Repeat. *(We recommend that you skip this step until after you have delivered your baby).*
 - **Back.** Arch your back away from the chair. Repeat.
 - **Legs and thighs.** Lift your legs up from the chair, holding them straight out in the air. Repeat.
 - **Calves.** Point your toes back toward your chest, creating tension in your lower legs. Repeat.
 - **Feet.** Curl your toes downward, as if digging them into sand. Feel the tension in your arches. Repeat.
- When you have finished this, notice how you feel all over your body.**