

# Progressive Muscle Relaxation

STRONG<sup>4</sup>LIFE™



As kids grow older, they face new stressors and challenges. By helping your child develop healthy **coping skills** (tools to help them manage their feelings and reduce stress), you're helping them become more **resilient** (better able to handle life's ups and downs).

## Why practice progressive muscle relaxation?

Stress can cause our muscles to be tense and tight. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR) is a relaxation exercise that helps us calm our bodies and minds by slowly and progressively tensing and relaxing our muscles, one group at a time.



It is difficult to learn something new when we are **anxious, angry or distracted**.

Teaching and practicing coping skills when everyone is calm gives us a variety of tools we can use to manage our feelings and reduce stress.

## How to practice progressive muscle relaxation

- 1 Sit or lie down in a comfortable, relaxed position.
- 2 Take a few deep breaths in through your **nose** and out through your **mouth**.
- 3 Begin tightening and releasing one muscle group at a time: **Inhale as you tighten. Hold for 5 seconds. Exhale as you relax.**
  - **Face** (scrunch up your nose and mouth)
  - **Shoulders** (lift your shoulders up as if you're trying to make them touch your ears)
  - **Arms**
  - **Fists** (pretend you're squeezing an orange or lemon)
  - **Stomach** (pull your belly button toward your back)
  - **Legs and thighs.**
  - **Feet and toes** (imagine that your feet are in sand or mud)
- 4 Now, take several deep breaths and notice how loose and relaxed your body has become. If there is any remaining tension in your body, tense and relax those muscles, while breathing in and out.



**You should be** tensing your muscles, but not to the point of straining them. If you are uncomfortable or feel any pain, stop. Remember to go slowly and take deep breaths in and out throughout the exercise.

# Make progressive muscle relaxation work for you



Use PMR at any time, without anyone even noticing. For example:

- Squeeze and relax your fists under your desk during class
- Scrunch and relax your toes in your shoes



Simplify and shorten the exercise by selecting only one or a few muscle groups to focus on.



Start from the top of your body and work your way down, or start from the bottom and work your way up. Do what feels most comfortable for you.



**Coping strategies**, like progressive muscle relaxation, are also helpful for adults. Practicing coping strategies is a great way to take care of yourself, be more present and model healthy ways to manage stress.

For more coping skills ideas, visit [Strong4Life.com/coping](https://Strong4Life.com/coping)