



## Relaxation: 20 minutes muscular relaxation technique

Tense muscles are a common reaction to stress. Few of us get through a normal workday without some tension in the neck and shoulder area. Here's an exercise to help you relax your muscles and become more aware of tension in your body. It takes approximately 20 minutes of uninterrupted time.

Find somewhere quiet and comfortable. At work you might use a corner of the staffroom, or an empty classroom or study hall or office. At home, you may need to make space by turning off your phone and asking your family not to disturb you.

Sit comfortably on a chair or on the floor, or lie down with your arms by your sides. Relax your entire body as much as possible, allowing it to feel heavy. Take a few slow, deep breaths. Imagine the tension flowing out with each breath.

Now begin by tensing your feet. Scrunch up your toes as tight as possible for about five seconds then relax. As you release the tension notice what happens to your muscles. Try to capture that feeling. Repeat for each part of your body:

- Feet, calves, thighs: push down firmly against the floor
- Arms: tighten your biceps
- Hands: make fists, then stretch your fingers wide
- Buttocks: clench buttocks tightly
- Abdominal muscles: suck in, then push out
- Chest: expand firmly by inhaling
- Shoulders: hunch your shoulders up and back
- Neck: stretch up as far as possible while you pull your chin to your chest
- Jaw: clench your teeth together
- Eyes: screw up your eyes tight shut
- Forehead: frown deeply

Now sit or lie still for five minutes, just enjoying the feeling of your muscles being relaxed. Continue to breathe slowly and deeply. When you're ready to get up, count backward from ten to one.

Done regularly, this exercise not only relaxes you, but it also trains your body to recognize and reduce muscle tension. Do it daily if possible, along with briefer sessions for any muscles that feel particularly tense.

## Where can I go for further support or information?

If you are an educator from one of the districts that have signed up to this service and you wish to speak to a qualified counselor, you can call the toll free Educator Support Line on 1-877-876-4327.