

STEPS primary care mental health team, Glasgow

Relaxation

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This handout will tell you how to get the best from the relaxation you can download from STEPS*. This kind of relaxation is called:

Progressive Muscular Relaxation.

For short, I will call it PMR from now on.

- www.glasgowsteps.com/downloads

(then click 'audio' and download both 'Deep' and 'Quick' relaxation)

Stress affects two main parts of the body:

Muscles, e.g.:

- tight chest
- pain at the back of the neck
- aches and pains

Autonomic Nervous System (ANS), e.g.:

- heart racing
- feeling breathless
- sweating

Stress tenses your muscles. Stress speeds up your body. PMR teaches you:

- to relax the muscles
- to control your breathing. This, in turn, controls the ANS and slows down your body

Together these two skills will teach you how to control your body

PMR divides into three parts

Part 1) Deep Relaxation

Part 2) Quick Relaxation

Part 3) Prevention

Part 1: Deep Relaxation

Deep relaxation is the form most favoured by experts in stress control. Downloading to a CD or mp3 will make it easy for you to learn.

One word of warning. If you have any problems such as a back problem and think that PMR might make it worse, ask your GP before you play it.

Let us look at some of the common questions about PMR:

What is it?

PMR teaches you how to relax your body and mind. You first become aware of the way stress affects your body (*'I didn't realise that my shoulders were up at my ears all day'*). Once you are aware of this, you then use it to get rid of it. Once you get good at it, you will spot stress creep into your body at a much earlier stage. So you will be able to nip it in the bud.

Like all skills, PMR takes time to pick up. You should expect that it will take a few weeks to start to feel relaxed when you play it. Bear in mind you are learning something you have lost the knack of or even haven't had in the first place. So be patient.

How can I find the time?

When you feel stressed, it can be hard to find time to get anything done. So the first major test is to find time each day to play it. If you can, try to play it at the same time each day to build up a routine.

Where should I play it?

Play it in a room where you can get some peace and quiet. Play it where you can be warm and comfy. You could try different rooms to see which is best for you.

DON'T play it while driving your car for obvious reasons.

Should I sit or lie down?

Suit yourself. The best places may be the bed or the settee. You may prefer the floor. If you have a comfy chair (recliners are very good), you could use this.

When should I play it?


Every day. You have to give it top priority if you want to learn to relax. Decide what time of day suits you best and, if you can, stick to this time.

What will happen when I play it?

You will hear my voice. I will get you to tense and relax your muscles. The idea is that you become aware of the difference between tension and relaxation in your muscles. You will work your way through all the major muscles in your body, relaxing them as you go.

As you do this, I will help you to slow your breathing to a steady pace. This will help slow down your body and help it relax more.

Toward the end of it, you will move onto ways to relax your mind. After I stop talking, you can just stay where you are to enjoy the relaxed feeling. You count back from 4 to 1 to end.

 *Please note that this is not a hypnotic. So don't worry about going into a trance. You will be in complete control.*

10 tips to help you relax

Get as comfy as you can before you start. Take off your shoes and wear loose clothes. Make sure the room is warm. If you can, take the phone off the hook. Make sure no one comes in the room while you play it. If they want to join in from the start then that is fine.

At first, you should play it when you are feeling fairly calm. You will be able to concentrate better. This will let you pick up the skill more quickly.

When you go to play it, you may think of all the other things you should be doing instead. This is a common problem. Do not get distracted. You must set aside time to relax.

As with learning any skill, practice makes perfect. So play it each day. Try to use it at the same time.

Don't worry about how well or badly you are doing. Most people find that their mind wanders during the first few weeks. This is normal. As you get used to it, this will improve. Let relaxation come in its own time. Don't try to rush it and, when the feeling comes, enjoy it.

Practise slowing down your breathing to about 10-12 breaths per minute at various times of the day. Use the seconds hand on your watch. This will help you keep your body calm right across the day.

PMR can leave you feeling nicely drowsy. Some people fall asleep. If you are one of them, don't worry but bear in mind that you are learning a skill. So you will get more out of it if you can stay awake. If you need to be alert after using it, e.g. for driving, make sure that you feel fully on the ball before setting off.

You may find that when you tense your muscles, you hold your breath. Don't worry; most people do this at the start. Try to keep the muscle tensing and breathing control separate.

Keep a diary. There are diaries at the end of this handout. Fill them in after you play it each time. These will let you check your progress as the days go by.

Keep playing your *Deep PMR on Track 1* until you can relax well. At this point, you should switch to *Quick PMR on Track 2*.

Part 2: Deep Relaxation

Track 2 allows you to fine-tune your new skills. The idea is the same as before except that now you can learn to relax more quickly. It is a quick version of Track 1. Same rules apply - play the Quick track at the same time each day. As before, don't expect to pick it up at once. So don't be put off when it does not work first time.

If you want to play both tracks each day then go ahead. But the whole aim of PMR is, of course, to teach you a way to control your stress. You should aim to phase it out (you will get bored with it in any case). So your final job is:

Part 3: Prevention

Think of a soldier entering enemy territory. He expects to be attacked at any moment. He carries a weapon so that he can fight back. As he is well trained, he knows what to look out for and, if he can, avoid getting into a fight. But if it comes to it, he knows how to win the fight.

The soldier is *you*, the enemy is *stress*, the weapon is the skill of *relaxation*, enemy territory is anywhere you feel under stress.

With the aid of your new skill, you can go into these places armed with a weapon that you did not have before. You now have a way of staying in control. As you will be more alert to stress building up, you can nip it in the bud before it gets the chance to get a grip of you.

Once you are relaxing yourself without it, stick to the bits that work best for you. This could be breathing control, relaxing your shoulders, etc. If you are with others, do the bits no one will notice.

Summary

Start with Deep Relaxation / keep a diary

Play it every day until you learn to relax.

Move to Quick Relaxation

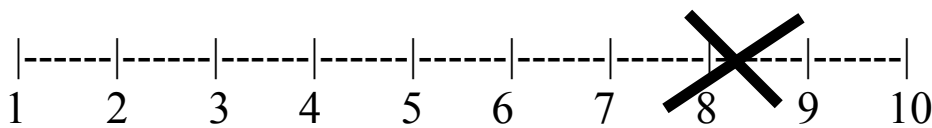
Play it every day until you can relax quickly.

Prevent stress building up by nipping it in the bud

Do it in 'real life' as soon as you feel stress start to build up.

Relaxation diary

Before you begin, rate how stressed you feel using the 1-10 scale below. A score of 10 would mean your stress could not be worse. A score of 1 would mean you were not under any stress. When it ends, rate your stress again using the same scale. You can also make some notes about how you got on. Look at the example below.



This rating would mean you were under a lot of stress.

Fill out the diary each time you play it.

Weeks 1 and 2

	Time and place	Stress level before playing	Stress level after playing
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			
Day 8			
Day 9			
Day 10			
Day 11			
Day 12			
Day 13			
Day 14			

Weeks 3 and 4

	Time and place	Stress level before playing	Stress level after playing
Day 1			
Day 2			
Day 3			
Day 4			
Day 5			
Day 6			
Day 7			
Day 8			
Day 9			
Day 10			
Day 11			
Day 12			
Day 13			
Day 14			

Tackling other problems

Many people find that having a problem relaxing is only one problem among others. If you feel you would like to tackle problems such as stress, anxiety, poor sleep, depression, panic, low self-confidence, etc., then **STEPS** might be able to help.

If you live in the south east of the city, ask at your GP practice for more information or take a look at our web site (www.glasgowsteps.com) to find out more.