

EMOTIONAL RESOURCE

3.2 PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION (PMR)

The body is an important part of emotional experience. This means that our emotions can cause changes in our bodies, and this is the case with our muscles. Emotions can influence our muscles because they are designed to kick us into action - anger is a classic example. When anger tells us we are being treated unfairly, our bodies automatically react by tensing our muscles. This is part of our so-called fight-or-flight response, which helps our bodies react to threats more effectively (e.g. we can fight better as our muscles are tense).

However, if we are trying not to act on our anger this excessive tension can cause all sorts of uncomfortable physical symptoms (e.g. tightness, stiffness, aches and pains). Unchecked, these physical symptoms can then get us stuck in the red zone (feeling too much), causing more anger and a negative cycle that can eventually lead to aggression. Over time, these physical symptoms can also lead into problems like chronic pain.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR) is a relaxation strategy to gain better control over muscle tension. It involves learning to tense particular muscle groups before allowing them to relax. Strangely, causing more tension in this way actually helps the muscles to relax because of something your body naturally does called '*homeostasis*'. This means your body is always trying to stay in balance, so if you push it one way (e.g. to become more tense) it will automatically react in the opposite way (to become more relaxed).

It is important to point out that because PMR works by bringing you down from the red zone (feeling too much), **it should not be used when you find yourself in the blue zone** (feeling too little). This could cause you to slip deeper into the blue zone.

Although you have this although you will have a copy of a relaxation CD or access to a tracks on the moodcafe website, which can guide you in Controlled Breathing, the instructions on the next page may also be helpful.

PMR - Instructions

1. Begin by getting yourself as physically comfortable as you can and practising controlled breathing.
2. When you are ready, tense the muscles you are focusing on. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much as you feel pain. Keep the muscle tense for approximately 5 seconds.
3. Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say something like “relax” as you relax the muscle.
4. When you have finished the relaxation exercise with all muscle groups, remain seated for a few moments until you feel more alert.

Muscle Groups: Practice PMR on the following groups of muscles

- Right hand and arm: clench your fist then bring your forearm to your shoulder to make a muscle.
- Left hand and arm: clench your fist then bring your forearm to your shoulder to make a muscle.
- Right Foot: curl in your toes
- Left foot: curl in your toes
- Right lower and upper legs: Pull your toes towards you to stretch your calf muscle. Then tighten your right thigh.
- Left lower and upper legs: Pull your toes towards you to stretch your calf muscle. Then tighten your right thigh.
- Stomach and chest: Breathe in deeply, filling your chest and lungs up with air.
- Back muscles: Pull your shoulders back a little and squeeze your shoulder blades together.
- Neck and shoulders: Shrug your shoulders up towards your ears. Push your head back slightly. Look up towards the ceiling and to the floor.
- Face and head: Frown your forehead, as though you were angry. Raise your forehead as though you were surprised. Smile widely. Open your mouth widely, as though you were yawning.

When you are finished the exercise, allow yourself to sit for a few minutes until you feel more alert.