



## Active Muscle Relaxation

Having pain, feeling stressed, being in bed, or just needing to rest a lot, can lead to muscle tension and discomfort. Part of the discomfort comes from not moving or playing or just using your muscles enough. It's strange to think that resting too much can make our muscles sore, but that's often what happens.

And, if we are in pain it's very common to tense up muscles around the areas where there is discomfort. In a way, this is how your body tries to protect itself. It guards against discomfort with increased muscle tension. But, as it turns out, teaching these muscles how to relax can lead to much more comfort.

In order to get these muscles to relax, we're going to tighten each muscle group about 10 seconds and then allow each muscle group to relax for about 10 seconds. Try to keep your attention focused on each muscle group as we go. Keep in mind that as you tense each muscle group you want to use your energy to hold the muscle tight, but you do not need to strain yourself. If there are any muscle groups that are particularly sore or if you are unable for any reason to tense a particular muscle group, just continue with your deep breathing and general relaxation through that muscle group and then continue. Try to focus on recognizing the difference between how your muscles feel when they are tense and when they are relaxed.

To get started, just settle into the bed or chair where you are. Make some adjustments to be sure that you feel well supported and comfortable. We're going to start by taking three deep breaths bringing the air all the way down into your belly and exhaling slowly each time as if you're breathing out through straw. Breathing in... and breathing out. As you breathe out imagine that the tension in your body is just starting to drain away. Find the pace for your breathing. Easy, effortless, and relaxed.

Now, hold both of your arms out straight in front of you, lock your elbows and clench your fists. Hold tension in your arms and fists as tight if you possibly can. Hold it for, *1, 2, 3, 4, 5,....10.*



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Now, squeeze just a little bit tighter. Good. And then release. Allow your arms to fall back to your side with your palms facing up and allow the fingers in your hands to relax and uncurl.

Enjoy the sensations of relaxation in your arms, hands, and fingers. Take a deep breath in .....and then slowly breathe out being sure to allow any muscle tension in your arms or hands to just drain away. Excellent.

Notice now how limp and relaxed your arms and hands feel. Perhaps they also feel light or tingly or warm or heavy. Take a deep breath and enjoy this pleasant sensation whatever it may be for you.

Now tighten your biceps, the muscles between your shoulders and your elbows, by bringing your forearms up towards your shoulders as if you were making a muscle with both arms and squeeze your fists. Hold tension in your biceps and count with me, *1, 2, 3, 4, 5.*

Now, squeeze just a little bit tighter. And then release. Again, allow your arms to fall back to your side with your palms facing up and allow the fingers in your hands to relax and uncurl. Enjoy the sensations of relaxation in your biceps and shoulders. Take a deep breath in and then slowly breathe out being sure to allow any muscle tension in your biceps or shoulders to just drain away. Resting now and enjoying the sensation of having your bicep muscles release and relax. Great job.

Next, we're going to tighten the muscles in your face by clenching your eyelids tightly shut. Hold tension all around your eyes and count with me, *1, 2, 3, 4, 5.*

Now, squeeze just a little bit tighter. And then release. Enjoy the sensations of relaxation in your in your eyes and all around your forehead and even across the top of your head. Take a deep breath and then slowly breathe out being sure to allow any tension in your eyes, forehead or top of your head to just drain away. Just draining away. Resting now and enjoying the sensation of having your face and eyes release and relax. Thinking quietly to yourself, "I am relaxed and comfortable." Excellent.

Next we're going to focus on the muscles in your jaw. Open your mouth so wide that it feels you cannot open the hinges of your jaw any wider. Hold your mouth open wide as you can and count with me, *1, 2, 3, 4, 5,.....10.*



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Now, open just a little bit bigger. And then release. Notice the sensations of relaxation in your jaw, cheeks and neck. Take a deep breath in and then slowly breathe out being sure to allow any remaining tension in your jaw, cheeks or neck to just drain away. Resting now and enjoying the sensation of having your jaw and neck release and relax. Thinking quietly to yourself as you breathe, "I am relaxed and comfortable." Notice how still your body has become. You are doing wonderfully.

Now we're going to focus on the muscles in your neck and back. Tilt your head backwards, so that you have a gentle stretch on your neck, arch your back, stick out your belly, and try to bring your shoulder blades together behind you as you maintain this stretch. Count in your mind, *1, 2, 3, 4, 5....10.*

Now, squeeze just a little bit tighter. Hold it. And then release. Enjoy the sensations of relaxation in your neck, back and shoulders. Take a deep breath in and then slowly breathe out being sure to allow any remaining tension in your neck, back or shoulders to just drain away. Just drain away. Resting now and enjoying the sensation of comfort in your neck, back, and shoulders. Thinking quietly to yourself as you breathe and rest, "I am relaxed and comfortable."

Now we're going to focus on your legs. First squeeze the muscles in your thighs all the way down to your knees. You will need to tighten the muscles in your hips, the top of your thighs and the bottom of your thighs. Hold the tension in your legs and count with me, *1, 2, 3, 4, 5....10.*

Now, squeeze just a little bit tighter. And then release. Enjoy the sensations of relaxation in your upper legs from your hips all the way down to your knees. Take a deep breath in and then slowly breathe out being sure to allow any remaining tension in your legs to just drain away. Resting now and enjoying the sensation of having your thighs and hips release and relax. Thinking quietly to yourself as you breathe, "I am relaxed and comfortable." Notice how calm, focused and relaxed you've become.

Next we're going to focus on your lower legs. Tighten your calf muscles by flexing your toes up so they are pointing at your head. Hold the tension in your calves and count with me, *1, 2, 3, 4, 5....10.*



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Now, squeeze just a little bit tighter. Hold it. And then release. Focus on the sensations of relaxation in your in your lower legs, your ankles and your feet. Take a deep breath in through your nose and then slowly breathe out being sure to allow any tension in your in your lower legs to just drain away. Just draining away. Resting now and enjoying the sensation of having your lower legs release and relax. Thinking quietly to yourself as you breathe, "I am relaxed and comfortable." Excellent.

Now, tighten the muscles in your feet by pointing your toes away from you. Holding tension for a moment in the arch of your foot, the top of your foot and your calf. Hold that position as you count with me, *1, 2, 3, 4, 5....10.*

Now, squeeze just a little bit tighter. And then release. Enjoy the sensations of relaxation in your feet and lower legs. Take a deep breath in through your nose and then slowly breathe out being sure to allow any tension in your feet or legs to just drain away. Just draining away. Resting now and enjoying the sensation of having your feet and lower legs release and relax. Thinking quietly to yourself as you breathe, "I am relaxed and comfortable." Great job.

Now, I invite you to close your eyes if they are not already closed. Imagine for a moment that you are floating on a raft in a warm ocean. Feel the waves pass beneath you as you are gently rocked from your head down to your toes. Floating up and over a gentle wave and then back down. With each gentle wave you float over your body feels more and more relaxed. Up and over the waves, rocking in the warm ocean. Feeling the water and the waves wash over you. Each wave draining more and more tension from your body.

Now that you've completely soothed your body, just enjoy this feeling for the next minute. At the end of one minute you will hear my voice again.

Wonderful job. Now, as we conclude this exercise, you may return to feeling awake and focused or you may choose to drift off to sleep. Either way, you will take these soothing feelings with you. I will slowly count backwards from "5" to "1." When I reach "1" you can choose to open your eyes feeling rested, alert, relaxed, and very comfortable or you may choose to gently drift off into a deep and comfortable sleep.

*Five..... Four..... Three..... Two..... One.*