Progressive Relaxation

The purpose of this exercise is to provide you with a short (5-10 min) procedure, which can be done quickly and easily in many situations. Used regularly, this exercise will help you feel more relaxed and free of physical tension. The exercise progresses through the body, from hands to head and from shoulders to toes, to help us experience the relaxation response in each of the nineteen muscle groups. This is achieved by alternately tensing and then relaxing the muscles in each group. By paying attention to both the feelings of tension and relaxation, we not only become more relaxed, but we learn to distinguish tension more easily in everyday life. For those of us who are under much pressure and for those who get extremely tense, it is all too easy to forget how wonderful a relaxed state feels.

Begin by lying comfortably on your back on a firm surface (like a carpeted floor). If need be though, this exercise can be done while standing, sitting in a chair, or riding in a car.

Proceed through each of the nineteen muscle groups, tensing each muscle, holding the tension for a count of “5,” then relaxing and feeling the tension slowly disappear.

1. Clench both of your fists
2. Flex your hands back at your wrists, tensing the forearm
3. Bring your hands to your shoulders, tensing your biceps
4. Shrug your shoulders; try to touch your ears
5. Wrinkle your forehead
6. Make a strong frown face
7. Close your eyes tight
8. Press your tongue against the roof of your mouth
9. Press your lips together tightly
10. Bring your head back, tensing the back of the neck & upper shoulders
11. Bring your head forward, tensing the neck and front part of the chest
12. Arch your back, tensing the back muscles
13. Take a deep breath, hold, then exhale
14. Suck your stomach inward
15. Tense your stomach muscles as if someone were going to hit you there
16. Tense your buttocks
17. Tense your thighs
18. Tense your calves by pointing your toes away from you
19. Tense your feet by scrunching your toes

NOTE: THIS EXERCISE IS NOT MEANT TO BE PAINFUL. APPLY ONLY ENOUGH TENSION TO FEEL IT.