# NIU EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

# Progressive Relaxation

Progressive Relaxation is a skill that teaches your body to relax. If you can relax your body during stressful times, then you remain calm, think clearly about the problem, and respond in a positive manner. These skills are expected in effective leaders in today’s workplace. When you can keep your body in a relaxed state by using progressive relaxation, then you will become angry less often and be able to let go of your anger very quickly when you do let stress get to you. The goal is to be able to let go of tension any time you feel it, anywhere in 30 seconds or less. Progressive Relaxation is also a helpful tool when you have sleep challenges.

The process of relaxation is the same for each muscle group. First you focus in your mind the muscle group you will tense, then inhale deeply and squeeze the muscle group as hard as you can for 5-8 seconds and exhale slowly as you release the tension in your muscle group. Starting from your toes or your head, you will move progressively through each muscle group.

NOTE: Do not tense areas of physical pain, injury, or recent surgery. Remove contact lenses.

It is recommended to consult with your physician before practicing relaxation techniques. This relaxation practice is not recommended if a person has a history of serious injuries, muscle spasms, or back problems, as the deliberate tensing of muscles could exacerbate any of these pre-existing conditions.

# Developing Your Progressive Relaxation Skills

In order to develop the habit of progressive relaxation and be able to relax at anytime, anywhere, you will have to practice the progressive relaxation skills every day for a month. Pick a time of day to practice these skills where nothing (almost nothing) will interfere with your commitment to practice progressive relaxation. Remember these skills are essential to keeping yourself calm in the midst of challenging situations or to learning how to let go of your anger. So, select one of the tools below to assist you in learning these skills. Eventually, you will be able to do it on your own without any aids.

# Progressive Relaxation Links

[www.guidetopsychology.com/pmr.htm](http://www.guidetopsychology.com/pmr.htm) is produced by the University of Chicago Press and provides some good descriptions of progressive relaxation and also connects the need to deep breathe as you tense a muscle group and exhale as you let go of the muscle group.

**Feature audio and video instruction:**  Austin Counseling and Mental Health Center at University of Texas produced a progressive relaxation program developed by Maria Craig and Lana Harder, Program Development Staff. This program includes instructions on how to tense and relax your muscles and visualizations to assist you in visualizing a relaxing place. <https://www.cmhc.utexas.edu/mindbodylab.html>

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