

## Get Calm and Relax

When we are anxious and stressed it is very difficult to perform at our peak potential. Some stress can be a good motivator but continual stressors can wear us down.

In particular in exam situations many of us have experienced blocks. You know the experience; you read the question in an exam situation know the answer but can't get it out.

More and more these days elite sportspersons and teams apply a variety of relaxation techniques before they perform.

Below is a description of a variety of relaxation techniques you can use.

### Progressive Relaxation Techniques (PMR)

The idea behind PMR is to teach you how to become more aware of when and where you feel tension in your body.

To try this, you need to moderately tense the muscles in your body, one by one, starting with your hands and moving down to your feet. Once you've tensed a particular muscle and held the tension for about seven to ten seconds, relax and allow the muscle to limp for about fifteen to twenty seconds. This will allow you to experience a sense of relaxation before you move on.

To do this properly, you should get comfortable in a chair or bed and try to clear your mind of any worries or thoughts. Clearing your mind may not happen readily at first, but will become easier with practice. Some students find it useful to think calming thoughts to themselves when using this technique such as 'relax', 'let go of any tension', or 'be calm'. You should then practise a slow breathing method for about a minute, **breathing in for 4 seconds and out for 6 seconds, imagining that the tension is flowing out of your body with each breath out.**

While breathing slowly in and out, curl your hands into a fist and hold the tension for seven to ten seconds and then relax the muscles in your fists. Notice the looseness in your hand once it is relaxed, and contrast this with the tension you just felt in this muscle. It's crucial that you tense your muscles moderately and do not experience any pain. Further, try to release the tension instantly and feel the muscle go immediately limp.

**Next, tense and relax your muscles in the following order:**

- **Lower arms** - bend your hand down at the wrist, as though you were trying to touch the underside of your arm, and then relax.
- **Upper arms** – tighten your biceps by bending your arm at the elbow, then relax
- **Shoulders** – lift your shoulders up as if trying touch your ears with them, then relax
- **Neck** – stretch your neck gently to the left, then forward, then to the right, then to the back in a slow rolling motion, then relax.
- **Forehead and scalp** – raise your eyebrows, and then relax.
- **Eyes** – screw up your eyes, and then relax.
- **Jaw** – clench your teeth (just to tighten the muscles), then relax.
- **Tongue** – press your tongue against the roof of your mouth, then relax.
- **Chest** – breathe in deeply to inflate your lungs, then breathe out and relax.
- **Stomach** – push your tummy out to tighten the muscle, and then relax.
- **Upper back** – pull your shoulders forward with your arms at your side, then relax.
- **Lower back** – while sitting, lean your head and upper back forward, rolling your back into a smooth arc thus tensing the lower back, then relax.
- **Buttocks** – tighten your buttocks, then relax.
- **Thighs** – while sitting, push your feet firmly into the floor, then relax
- **Calves** – lift your toes off the ground towards your shins, then relax.
- **Feet** – gently curl your toes down so that they are pressing into the floor, then relax.