
stress exercises Muscle Relaxation Exercises..... 8/24/04

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Progressive Muscle Relaxation Progressive muscle relaxation is one example of a deep relaxation technique that can be used to reduce symptoms of stress, anxiety, insomnia, and certain types of chronic pain. Based upon the simple premise of tensing, or tightening, one muscle group at a time followed by a release of the tension, this form of relaxation is used by physicians (in combination with standard therapies) for a number of conditions, including headaches, cancer pain, high blood pressure, and digestive disturbances. This form of muscle relaxation is progressive in two senses. Firstly, the muscle groups are tightened and relaxed one at a time in a specific order, generally commencing with the lower extremities and ending with the face, abdomen, and chest, although other sequences have been used by some practitioners. Secondly, a greater degree of muscle tension is attempted in subsequent exercises as compared with beginning efforts as one gains experience with the technique. The technique of progressive muscle relaxation was described by Edmund Jacobson in the 1930s based upon his premise that mental relaxation should naturally result from physical relaxation. Like the Relaxation Response pioneered by Herbert Benson in the 1970s, progressive muscle relaxation can be learned by nearly anyone and requires only 10-20 minutes per day. You may practice this technique seated or lying down in a completely quiet place free from all distractions. The individual muscle groups are tightened for 5-8 seconds and the tension is then released. While releasing the tension, try to focus on the changes you feel when the muscle group is relaxed. Imagery may be helpful in conjunction with the release of tension; you can try to imagine stressful feelings flowing out of your body as you relax each muscle group. You should stay relaxed for 15-30 seconds and move on to the next muscle group. In addition to its stress-reduction and health benefits, progressive muscle relaxation is an excellent tool to help learn about the body and its signals. With practice and time, you can learn to accurately identify tension signals in your body and actively work to reduce stress and tension and their accompanying physical reactions. <http://stress.about.com/cs/relaxation/a/aa110600a.htm>

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