



Comprehensive  
Behavioral  
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## **Deep Breathing, Progressive Muscular Relaxation & The Relaxation Response**

### **Introduction:**

This tool introduces three useful physical relaxation techniques that can help you reduce muscle tension and manage the effects of the fight-or-flight response on your body. This is particularly important if you need to think clearly and perform precisely when you are under pressure.

The techniques we will look at are Deep Breathing, Progressive Muscular Relaxation and “The Relaxation Response”.

### **Using These Techniques:**

#### **Deep Breathing:**

Deep breathing is a simple but very effective method of relaxation. It is a core component of everything from the “take ten deep breaths” approach to calming someone down, right through to yoga relaxation and meditation. It works well in conjunction with other relaxation techniques such as Progressive Muscular Relaxation, relaxation imagery and meditation to reduce stress.

To use the technique, take a number of deep breaths and relax your body further with each breath. That’s all there is to it!

#### **Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR):**

Progressive Muscular Relaxation is useful for relaxing your body when your muscles are tense.

The idea behind PMR is that you tense up a group of muscles so that they are as tightly contracted as possible. Hold them in a state of extreme tension for a few seconds. Then, relax the muscles to their previous state. Finally, consciously relax the muscles even further so that you are as relaxed as possible.

By tensing your muscles first, you will probably find that you are able to relax your muscles more than would be the case if you tried to relax your muscles directly.

Experiment with PMR by forming a fist, and clenching your hand as tight as you can for a few seconds. Then relax your hand to its previous tension, and then consciously relax it again so that it is as loose as possible. You should feel deep relaxation in your hand muscles.

For maximum relaxation you can use PMR in conjunction with breathing techniques and imagery.

### **The “Relaxation Response”:**

We mentioned “The Relaxation Response” in our article on Meditation. In a series of experiments these techniques had a very real effect on reducing stress and controlling the fight-or-flight response. Direct effects included deep relaxation, slowed heartbeat and breathing, reduced oxygen consumption and increased skin resistance.

This is something that you can do for yourself by following these steps:

1. Sit quietly and comfortably.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Start by relaxing the muscles of your feet and work up your body relaxing muscles.
4. Focus your attention on your breathing.
5. Breathe in deeply and then let your breath out. Count your breaths, and say the number of the breath as you let it out (this gives you something to do with your mind, helping you to avoid distraction).

Do this for ten or twenty minutes.

An even more potent alternative approach is to follow these steps, but to use relaxation imagery instead of counting breaths in step 5.

### **Summary:**

“Deep Breathing,” “Progressive Muscular Relaxation,” and the steps leading to the “Relaxation Response” are three good techniques that can help you to relax your body and manage the symptoms of the fight-or-flight response.

These are particularly helpful for handling nerves prior to an important performance, and for calming down when you are highly stressed.

<http://www.mindtools.com/stress/RelaxationTechniques/PhysicalTechniques.htm>