

Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Self-Hypnosis, and Visualization for Deep Relaxation

Progressive Muscle Relaxation is a process developed by Edmund Jacobson in 1920, promoting the idea that physical relaxation leads to mental relaxation. This relaxation technique involves tensing and then relaxing different muscle groups in your body, one at a time.

My process combines progressive muscle relaxation with self-hypnosis and visualization. It is not an exercise that you can sit down for five minutes and complete, at least not until you have put in many hours achieving the mental state of total relaxation.

In the beginning, you want a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. You begin at the same part of your body each time you start the process. I start with my fingers. Some suggest starting with your toes; it is up to you. You just want to be consistent in the steps you take. So, we will use the hands for this example; however, you will repeat this process in every part of your body from head to feet.

Step-by-Step Guide

The first step is to actually feel your fingers. We live our lives on autopilot and do not focus on parts of our body; our movements just happen – like magic. For this mental exercise, you will focus on one finger at a time until you can feel each finger.

- Focus and relax each finger, slowly moving to the next finger
- Move on to the back of your hand, then your palm – relax and feel. Then, to your wrist, forearm, top, and bottom. Are you resting your arm on a chair, becoming aware of the feeling of your surroundings pressed against your body?
- Again, you can take any path you want, but here is mine. Fingers, hands, wrist, moving up the arm to the head. You are now feeling your face slowly, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, nose, etc. Relax and feel. Then, I work my way back down to the toes. Think about relaxing your brain, lungs, heart, and so on. We are not only our outside appearance. It is like a deep mental massage for our entire being.
- After you have completed relaxing all your body parts, go back and do the entire process again. Imagine each muscle group becoming heavy, then imagine them becoming lighter as if you can float in the air. Then try visualizing your body parts melting.

Repeat this process as you go through your entire body.

This is an exercise in retraining your mind and body. If you cannot complete the entire process at the beginning, do what you can. It is like building a habit; it requires repeated times of relaxing, becoming heavy, then becoming light, to retrain your body to be triggered by the visualization step. To reach a higher level of deep relaxation. You repeat the process until it becomes so automatic that when you think of your fingers relaxing, your entire body is triggered to respond.

Then we can move on to the next level.

Self-Hypnosis Integration

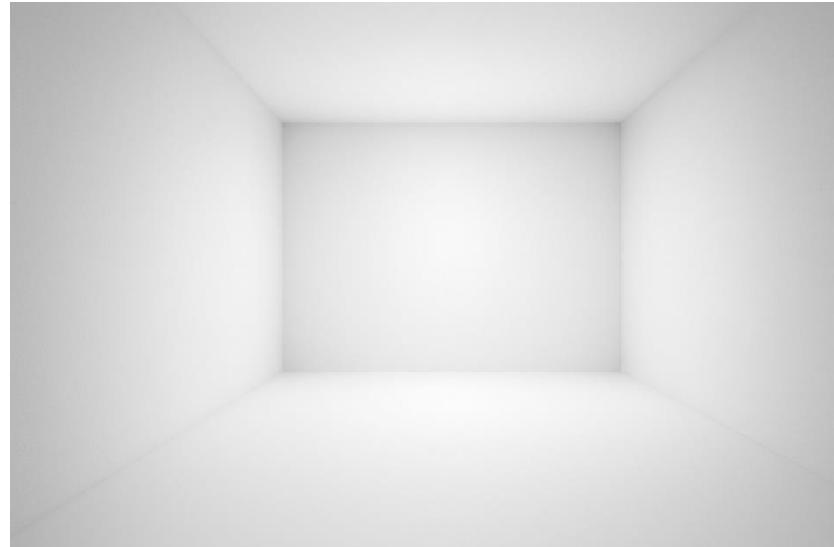
Self-hypnosis is a technique that uses deep relaxation and positive suggestions (autosuggestions) to achieve desired changes in feelings or behavior, such as reducing stress, improving sleep, or reaching goals. It involves creating a state of relaxed focus and heightened suggestibility. To perform it, find a quiet space, relax your body, and use present-tense, positive, and realistic statements to guide your mind.

In this exercise, self-hypnosis adds heaviness, lightness, and melting. These metaphors of transformation allow your body to dissolve into sensation, and your mind to enter a transitory place between what was and what's next. A mental virtual space.

Visualization and the White Room

Visualization is the creation of mental images to represent data or to achieve goals.

My space is the White Room, which is a metaphor for clarity and creation. It mirrors my love of blank pages and multimedia expressions. It's where my inner teacher, artist, and philosopher converge. I have internalized the steps of progressive muscle relaxation so deeply that the image alone triggers the cascade of relaxation steps — this is neuroplasticity in action, a rewiring of my relaxation response.



The White Room represents a blank canvas, infinite possibilities. The repeated relaxation techniques create a cognitive shortcut, a symbolic anchor.

The white room holds:

- **Safety:** No doors, no threats.

- **Freedom:** No furniture, no constraints.
- **Expression:** Walls you can write on, a space that listens.
- **Symbolism and Self-Authorship**

Design your special space. Focus on creating a mental image. The mental image could be of seeing yourself achieving a goal. I used visualization first to see myself completing a half-marathon. But in this case, we are using visualization to experience a desired state of being, a deep relaxation.

If this becomes a routine, and you do it repeatedly, it will soon become an automatic response. Now, when I sit and think about my fingers one at a time, the entire process is stored in my memory, triggering the deepest relaxation. I only have to start with my fingers, and the rest of my body knows the drill and relaxes.

Conclusion

After you have mastered this technique, you can do it anywhere, anytime. It is my go-to relaxation technique used when I have to wait for something, a doctor's appointment, a car repair shop, or sitting through a meeting that is not holding my interest. Also, when I feel anger or fear that will not go away.

In meditation, you often find a mental place where you can feel tranquil. At first, I started in a wooded area, with the ground covered in moss, water flowing from the mountain and filling a small pool, a place that, when I thought about it, relaxed me.

Where I finally ended up was a white room that I created for thinking. A large white room, no windows or doors, tall ceilings, no furniture or decorations. I realized that one of my joys in life is a blank piece of paper or canvas. Expressing myself in multimedia brings me joy. It helps to provide a visual representation of who I am, what I think, and how I feel. So now, instead of going through all the steps of progressive relaxation mentally, I go to my white room. Just the image triggers all the steps, and I become relaxed. It is a place where I can think and write or draw on the walls. It is a place that is home, comfortable, and safe.

What does your personal sanctuary look like?

How might you use this practice in your daily transitions?