

## Muscle and Sensory Awareness Relaxation

Progressive muscle and sensory awareness can be useful for many reasons. One reason is it just helps you feel better. If your body is relaxed, your body feels better. Now that might not be true if you're running or doing something physical where tensing your body might be what's needed, but most of the time in everyday life, a tense body really does you no good.

You can also use relaxation to combat anxiety or fear. Relaxation is incompatible with being really anxious. So if you're really anxious or really afraid, and you want to reduce that anxiety and fear, you can do it by relaxing your body. Relaxing your body relaxes your mind.

Now there's some really interesting research on this. Relaxation can be extremely helpful if you have a lot of physical pain. As it turns out, physical pain tends to make your muscles tense. Muscles react to pain by tensing up, like they're trying to protect themselves. And the problem is, once you get tensed up, it causes even more pain. So there's been a lot of research on dealing with chronic or even acute pain using relaxation.

Get yourself in one position - either sitting or lying down. If you're lying down, you want to be in a position where you're not going to fall asleep before I finish talking. Then in your own mind, scan your body and ask yourself, "What's my level of tension on a 0 to 100 scale?" So 100 would be you're the tensest, the tightest you've ever been in your entire life and you could never get tighter than this. That's 100. And 0, well to be frank, is you're practically comatose. You're drifting off to sleep. There is nothing tight anywhere in your entire body. Now some of you may have learned this scale and heard it called SUDs, short for Subjective Units of Distress. Each time you practice, you'll want to start by figuring out your SUDs and then end by figuring out your SUDs.

The beautiful thing about this is you can do parts of this in public. If you're really anxious in public, just squeeze your stomach in. It's a really good one to do because no one notices. Tense it, notice it. And just let go. You can also clench your hands in public. You could just clench, let go. You could also tense your feet in public.

The key to this is noticing the tension and noticing the letting go. So you see, the really rapid relaxation often helps you get your tension down, and you can take just some of it and practice the parts you want.

Alright, are you ready? Get yourself sitting down, or get yourself lying down. This is a five-minute relaxation.

What are your SUDs?

Just notice your hands, and take your hands and form them into fists. Tighten them up, but not all the way. Now notice and pay attention. Let go. Let your hands drop right onto your legs. Notice that. Notice the tension falling out of your hands.

Now let's take both hands, tense them up, and lift them to shoulder height. You're going to tense your whole arms. Tense the upper part of your arm and the lower part of the arm. Now hold it. Hold it and notice. Let go. Let them slap down on your lap. Notice the tension falling away. Notice.

Now we'll go to your shoulders. Pull your shoulders all the way up to your ears. Tense. Hold it, and notice the tension. Let go. Let them drop all the way down. Notice the difference.

Now go to your forehead. Tense your forehead up. Bring your eyebrows together, wrinkle up your whole forehead. Notice the tension and the tightness. Just hold it tense. Let go. Smooth the forehead out like a skating rink, just as smooth as ice.

Now your eyes - shut them tight. Hold it shut. Squeeze your eyes tight. Hold it. Let go. Keep your eyes closed, but let your eyelids just float in your eyes. Just notice them.

Now we're going to do the upper part of your face. Just tense your nose way up. Let your cheeks just wrinkle right up to your eyes. Tense. Hold it. Notice the tension. Let go. Let your whole face go droopy. Notice the difference.

*Dr. Marsha Linehan progresses through the lower cheeks and mouth, the teeth, chin, back, and stomach. Then through the thighs, calves, ankles, toes, and feet.*

What's your tension now? What are your SUDs? Just notice.