



## A Tool to Calm Your Mind <sup>[1]</sup>

Anonymous <sup>[2]</sup>4K reads

We know for a fact that people with social anxiety are frequently nervous and agitated. Constant worrying and the ‘flood’ of negative thoughts translate into an almost permanent state of tension. Besides thought challenging and behavioral change, there’s one more tool that works miracles against anxiety – relaxation.

Although the technique of relaxation has been derived from various religious practices, like Buddhism and Hinduism, today, the effectiveness of relaxation techniques has been backed up by countless clinical trials. In this article we’re going to focus on two basic relaxation techniques

### **1. Breathing Exercises**

This is the simplest form of relaxation. It’s also highly adaptable because you can practice it anywhere and it only takes a few minutes.

#### **How to Do It**

First, stop whatever you’re doing and simply focus on your breathing. Notice how your chest cavity contracts each time you exhale, and inflates when you inhale. Take a deep breath and focus on how your lungs are completely filled with air, then breathe out.

#### **Why It Works**

This exercise might seem ‘rudimentary’ but it truly works miracles, especially when you don’t have time for other options. The secret behind breathing exercises is that they take your mind off of those unpleasant negative thoughts. If you remember from our previous articles, negative thoughts can only affect us when we pay attention to them.

### **2. Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

This technique is a bit more complicated than breathing exercises, but it will increase your overall well-being. As you might have guessed from its name, progressive muscle relaxation is about gradually bringing your body into a state of calm. The ‘philosophy’ behind this technique is that an anxious mind cannot exist in a relaxed body. It usually takes around 20 minutes and requires a private place. Here’s how you do it.

## Find a Comfortable Position

Some people choose a cozy chair, while others prefer to lie on a bed. It doesn't really matter where you are, as long as you feel comfortable. Make sure to turn off your computer or TV, put your smartphone on silent and close your windows.

## Start With a Breathing Exercise

Do the above-mentioned breathing exercise for 3-5 minutes. This should calm your mind and prepare you for the next step.

## Tense Up Your Muscles

Apply tension to a specific muscle group while taking a deep breath. You'll do this with all the muscle groups in your body, but one at a time. Focus on a specific muscle group then squeeze the muscle hard for 5-10 seconds. You should feel tension and shake a bit. If you have a medical issue, such as broken bones or pulled muscles, avoid using that part of the body. It might also be a good idea to consult your physician about the potential risks of practicing progressive muscle relaxation.

## Relax Your Muscles

After 5-10 seconds of tension, quickly relax your muscle while exhaling. Again, you'll do this step for each muscle group that you target. First you tense the muscle, then you relax for 15-20 seconds. Just take your time and enjoy the pleasant feeling. When you're done with one muscle group, move on to the next. You can start with the muscles of the face, and slowly work your way towards your arms, chest, abdomen and legs. Last but not least, deliberately focus on the difference between tension and relaxation. This is the whole point of the exercise - for you to notice the difference between feeling tense and relaxed.

## Why It Works

Progressive muscle relaxation was specifically designed to relax your body, which will inevitably calm your anxious mind. As we said earlier, an anxious mind cannot exist in a relaxed body. It's a two-step process in which you alternate between tension and relaxation. Not only does it relax your body, but it also teaches you the difference between tension and relaxation. People with social anxiety are so used to feeling tense that they forget how good it feels to relax from time to time.

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