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Think Outside The Box

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Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Sleep and relaxation go hand in hand. In the previous article. As you already know, it is important to allow yourself some space, to unwind and do activities you enjoy, especially during the evening.

Not only will relaxing, enjoyable activities make you happier but they will also help you associate sleepy times with good times. After all, that is the objective of the entire process.

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Quiz Time!

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Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2

Quiz: Flags in Europe

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Relaxation Is in Your Hands

Relaxation, for many people, is easier said than done. Some personality types simply have that tendency to be more on the edge than others. However, even though frustrating thoughts and cognitive distortions are involuntary, we can still take action and learn how to calm our mind down.

If you've tried your best to apply the basic relaxation tips, you recently learned, and still feel anxious around bedtime, give Progressive Muscle Relaxation a try.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)

This is one of the most widely used and effective techniques, strongly recommended to people with anxiety. From obsessive thoughts to sleep disorders, or even panic attacks, PMR alleviates anxiety. It is a technique that's based on tensing and relaxing muscle groups in a controlled manner.

See, your mind and body are in a constant relationship with each other, and so after tensing a muscle and then relaxing it, your mind will follow, allowing you to let go of the stress. A relaxed body can create a relaxed mind, and vice versa.

Application of PMR

Do It at Night

Apply this technique at night, when you feel you can't stop your thoughts and get too uncomfortable to go to sleep. The process of PMR can last anywhere from 15 to 30 minutes.

Choose Your Location

Lay down flat on your back (sofa or floor - remember to only use your bed for sleeping) and take a few deep breaths. Do your best only to focus on what you're currently doing. If some other thoughts pop up, don't mind them and continue the activity.

Tense Up and Relax

You're going to tense up and relax your whole body, starting with your feet. Tense and curl your toes. Be mindful of the tension you apply and hold for about five seconds, then release and rest for about twenty seconds.

Move Up

Move on to your legs. Raise your right leg a little bit and tense those muscles. Focus on only tensing that leg. Arch the foot back for a little extra help. Hold (approximately for 5 seconds) and release (about 20 seconds).

Repeat for Each Limb

Repeat with your left leg. Remember to concentrate on the contrasted of tension and release, as you do PMR with each part of your body.

Once Again

Now, try it with both legs at once. Feel that strain, as you tense up, and then focus on the looseness, as you relax.

Flex Those Glutes

Before you move on to the next part of your body, flex your glutes and hold, then relax.

Your Stomach

Tighten your stomach, hold it and release, keep the same time frame, as you did with the legs – 5-second hold and a 20-second release.

Your Arms and Hands

Move up to your arms. Make a fist with your right hand and put all your force into it. When it's tense, release it just like you did with your feet and legs.

Change Arms

Repeat with your left arm. After that, repeat, but this time, bend your elbow so that you tense your forearm and your bicep. Feel each muscle group tighten separately. When you're done with each arm, do it with both arms at once.

Hunch Your Shoulders

If you're under a lot of stress, this will feel great since the shoulders and neck gather a lot of tension during the day. Hunch both your shoulders up, and then slightly pull them back. After feeling that tension, let it relax.

Move Further Up to Your Neck

Push your head back, tense it, and release. Go easy on your neck and shoulders. It's ok to feel some discomfort while tensing but not to the point of feeling actual pain. These areas can be injured if you move too aggressively.

Tense Your Face

Raise your eyebrows, scrunch your forehead, squeeze your eyelids, and if you don't have bruxism (or aren't prone to grind your teeth during sleep), clench your jaw – alternatively, you can pucker up your lips. Do each one of this separately so you can truly feel that contrast. Every period of tension must always be followed by a calm release.

Focus on Your Breath

After you've tensed up your muscles, and then progressively relaxed them, it's important to concentrate on your breathing. Allow your muscles to soften.

During the entire process, take a calm, deep breath, and try to make them as even as possible. Pay close attention to the sensation of having the breath come in and out of your body.

At the End

Do nothing. Lay still for a while and experience the feeling of having muscles that are in a completely rested state. Don't leave your spot, stay still and relaxed for another 5-10 minutes. You can then proceed to climb into your bed and have a great night's sleep.

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