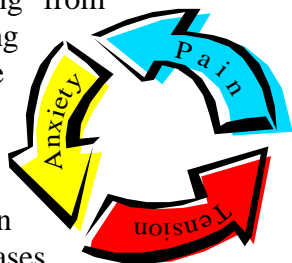


When humans sense danger or feel pain, the body is programmed to choose either “fight or flight.” This is the decision to face the danger or flee from it. However, a person suffering from chronic pain can see nothing to fight or to flee from. The anxiety produced by the desire to resolve this conflict produces tension, and tension in turn exacerbates pain. Pain increases anxiety, creating a situation that feeds on itself, as illustrated in the diagram.



We know that relaxation and anxiety are incompatible with each other. Like oil and water, they do not mix. As we become more relaxed, anxiety begins to leave, thereby producing less tension and consequently less pain. We can see from this that learning to reduce tension will have the effect of controlling pain.

Muscle relaxation is very easy to use, and consists of learning to tense and release various muscle groups throughout the body. An essential part of the process involves paying close attention to the feeling of tension and relaxation in your body. Strong tension is noticeable, and you will learn to attend to these feelings.

You will purposely create more tension in the body in order to use the momentum from the release of that tension to release the subtle tension produced by your anxiety. In normal relaxation, most people try to sit calmly and let the tension drain away. Deep muscle relaxation works by allowing you to release tension immediately. Learning relaxation is like learning other motor skills — it will take some time to become good at it.

Begin by loosening clothing and removing constraining items (watches, rings, eyeglasses, contact lenses, even your shoes, if you wish). Sit upright in a comfortable chair with your feet resting on the floor and your arms lying loosely in your lap. Close your eyes if this helps you to relax.

We will go through several exercises; each one is designed to release tension from a specific muscle group. Once a group of muscles is relaxed, do not move them unnecessarily. These exercises can be done at home or at work and completed in 10–15 minutes.

Exercises for Progressive Relaxation

If at any time you experience pain during this process, *stop immediately!*

- 1) Extend your arms in front of you and clench your fists. For this and each successive muscle group, tense the indicated muscle group for about 7–10 seconds and then completely relax those muscles (let them go completely limp) for 20–30 seconds before moving on to the next muscle group.
- 2) Extend your arms in front of you and point your fingers toward the ceiling as though you were pushing a wall.
- 3) Touch your fingers to your shoulders to tense your biceps.
- 4) Shut your eyes tightly so that you tense the muscles around your eyes, in your forehead, and your temples (skip this exercise if you are wearing contact lenses).

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- 5) Push your tongue against the roof of your mouth, clinch your molar teeth, and pull the corners of your lips around as though trying to touch your ears. (This will look like a bad grimace.)
 - 6) Pull your chin down one inch from your sternum (breastbone) and at the same time try to pull your chin further toward the sternum and backwards toward your back. This sets up antagonistic muscle reaction and can cause your head to tremor.
 - 7) Take a deep breath and hunch your shoulders up towards your ears.
 - 8) Pull your shoulders back as though trying to touch them together in the back.
 - 9) Suck your stomach in as though trying to touch your backbone.
 - 10) Push your buttocks into chair to tense your buttock muscles.
 - 11) Extend your legs in front of you and lift your heels six inches off floor to tense your thigh muscles.
 - 12) With your legs extended and heels resting on floor, point your toes toward your knees to tense your calf muscles.

- 13) With your legs extended and heels resting on floor, curl your toes under toward the arches (tense for 5 seconds only as these muscles easily experience cramps).

Staying completely relaxed, review the condition of each of these muscle groups. Notice the relaxed feeling you should now be enjoying. During the exercises, you may notice that your palms become warmer, that your upper torso becomes heavier and heavier. Concentrate on these effects since they are evidences of deep relaxation.

Sit quietly for several minutes. You might wish to use this experience for implanting more firmly in your mind that you can control the pain. Enjoy the feeling of relaxation and a lessening of your pain.

As you end the exercise session, gradually begin to move your feet, hands, head, and torso. Do not make any sudden movements; just gradually enter your normal routine, enjoying your relaxed state.

Try to practice this exercise twice a day — morning and evening are best for most people. Practicing in the morning often helps in beginning the day more centered, less feverishly. Practicing in the evening helps to wash out the cumulative stress of the day.

The International Pelvic Pain Society was formed to allow physicians, psychologists, nurses, physical therapists, and other professionals to coordinate, collect, and apply a growing body of information on chronic female pelvic pain. In doing this, we hope to be able to provide more relief and insure a more normal lifestyle for our patients. For membership information for healthcare professionals and patients, please contact us.

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