



**NHS Newcastle and North Tyneside  
Community Health**

# Stress Control

## Week 2

# **PART B: CONTROLLING YOUR BODY**

You will learn two Stress Control skills in Week 2. These are Progressive Muscular Relaxation and Exercise Therapy. These aim to calm your body.

## **SKILL 1:**

### **Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR)**

Stress fills you with energy and tenses the muscles. PMR teaches you to manage this by:

- Teaching you how to relax the muscles
- Teaching you how to control your breathing

These two skills will teach you how to control your body. The easiest way to learn it is by using a CD. You will get a CD in Class 2. It is yours to keep.

**PMR** divides into three parts:

**Part 1) Deep Relaxation**

**Part 2) Rapid Relaxation**

**Part 3) Prevention**

### **PART 1: Learning Deep Relaxation**

Deep relaxation is the form most favoured by experts in stress control. You will need a CD player.

One word of warning: If you have any problems such as a back injury and are concerned that PMR might make it worse, ask your GP for advice.

#### **What is it?**

PMR teaches you how to relax your body and mind. You first become aware of the way stress affects your body (*'I didn't realise that my shoulders were up at my ears all day'*). Once you become aware of this, you then use the CD to get rid of it. Once you get good at it, you will feel stress creep into your body at a much earlier stage, so you will be able to nip it in the bud.

Like all skills, PMR takes time to pick up. You should expect that it will take a few weeks to even start to feel relaxed when you play the CD. Bear in mind that you are learning something that might be new to you or you might be out of practice with, so be patient.

## ***Where should you play the CD?***

Play it in a room where you can get some peace and quiet and where you can be warm and comfy. Try different rooms to see which is best for you.

***DON'T*** play the CD while driving your car for obvious reasons.

## ***Should you sit or lie down?***

Suit yourself. The best places may be the bed or the settee. You may prefer the floor. If you have a comfy chair (recliners are very good), you could use this. If you are prone to falling asleep during relaxation it may be best to sit up rather than lie down.

## ***When should you play your CD?***

Many people under stress find it hard to find time for PMR. You must work at this. Perhaps start at aiming to do PMR 2 or 3 times a week.

## ***What will happen when you play the CD?***

You will hear a voice. You will tense and relax various muscles as instructed. The idea is that you become aware of the difference between tension and relaxation in your muscles.

The CD will then lead you to slow your breathing to a steady pace.

Toward the end of the CD, you will move onto ways to relax your mind. After the CD stops talking, you may want to just stay where you are to enjoy the relaxed feeling.

*Please note that this is not a hypnotic tape so don't worry about going into a trance. You will be in complete control.*

## **9 tips to help you relax**

1. Get as comfy as you can before you start. Take off your shoes and wear loose clothes. Make sure the room is warm. If you can, take the phone off the hook. Make sure no one in the house comes in the room while you play the CD. If they want to join in from the start then that is fine.
2. At first, you should play the CD when you are feeling fairly calm. You will be able to concentrate better. This will let you pick up the skill more

quickly.

3. When you go to play the tape/CD, you may think of all the other things you should be doing instead. This is a common experience when learning relaxation. Simply return your attention to the voice on the CD. You may have to do this several times.
4. As with learning any skill, practice makes perfect. So play the tape each day. Try to use it at the same time. Let relaxation come naturally. Don't try to rush it. When the feeling comes, enjoy it.
5. Use your Breathing Retraining skills (see p8 of this handout) to boost the relaxation. Practise slowing down your breathing to about 10-12 breaths per minute at various times of the day (use the seconds hand on your watch). This will help you keep your body calm right across the day.
6. PMR can leave you feeling nicely drowsy. Some people fall asleep. If you are one of them, don't worry, but bear in mind that you are learning a skill. So you will get more out of it if you can stay awake. If you need to be alert after using the tape, e.g. driving, make sure that you feel fully on the ball before setting off.
7. You may find that when you tense your muscles, you hold your breath. Don't worry, most people do this at the start. Try to keep the muscle tensing and breathing control separate.
8. Keep a diary. This helps you see if you are making progress. There are diaries at the end of this handout. Fill them in after each time you play the tape.
9. Keep playing your CD until you can relax well. At this point, you should switch to Rapid Relaxation (CD tracks 2 and 4).

## **PART 2: Learning Rapid Relaxation**

This lets you fine-tune your new skills. The idea is the same as before except that now you can learn to relax more quickly. It is simply a quick version of what you have just learned. The same rules apply - play the Rapid track at the same time each day. As before, don't expect to pick it up at once. So don't be put off when it doesn't work first time.

If you want to play both sections of your CD each day then go ahead - you can't get enough relaxation. However the whole aim of PMR is, of course, to teach you a way to control your stress. You should aim to reduce the amount you use your CD and eventually be able to relax without it. So your final job is:

## **PART 3: Prevention**

Think of a soldier entering enemy territory. He expects to be attacked at any moment. He carries a weapon so that he can fight back. As he is well trained, he knows what to look out for. If it comes to it, he knows how to win the fight. The soldier is you; the enemy is stress; the weapon is the skill of relaxation; enemy territory is anywhere you feel under stress.

With the aid of your new skill, you can go into these places armed with a weapon that you did not have before. You now have a way of staying in control. As you will be more alert to stress building up, you can nip it in the bud before it gets the chance to get a grip of you.

*In summary, you should:*

- Start with Deep Relaxation / keep a diary.
- Use the CD regularly until you learn to relax.
- Move to Rapid Relaxation.
- Prevent stress building up by nipping it in the bud.

## **SKILL 2:**

### **Exercise Therapy (ET)**

ET is a new approach used to control stress. We know that exercise is good for your health:

#### **The benefits:**

- ⇒ helps control weight
- ⇒ helps reduce blood pressure
- ⇒ helps keep your bones, muscles and joints healthy
- ⇒ improves your muscle tone
- ⇒ cuts down the chances of dying young
- ⇒ reduces risk of heart disease
- ⇒ reduces the risk of diabetes
- ⇒ reduces the risk of colon cancer
- ⇒ may ward off Alzheimer's Disease

So exercise makes sense if you want to stay fit and healthy. But we now know that exercise can also help fight stress. For this reason, it is now a part of Stress Control.

You may have found that you feel better after exercise. This is good but it won't last long. To get long lasting benefit, you need to do regular exercise.

#### **Do I have to get on the lycra gear?**

**No.** You can do this in your house, outside or in a gym. Exercise could be:

- ⇒ going to a gym
- ⇒ brisk walk
- ⇒ jogging or running
- ⇒ swimming
- ⇒ golf
- ⇒ football
- ⇒ badminton
- ⇒ aerobic video or class

Make sure you choose something you like. You could do a range of things to give you a bit of variety. Bear in mind that if you do go to the gym, it is getting you out of the house. It also lets you meet others. This can help in itself.

***How does exercise help stress?***

We know that it does help but we are not sure exactly how it works. Exercise is said to have the effects of a general boost in mood and happiness. This theory is the basis for numerous depression treatment programs that incorporate exercise.

***How much time do I need to spend?***

You should try to do at least 30 minutes most days of the week.

***Does this have to be at the one time?***

**No.** You could break it up. You could spread it across the day by doing 15 minutes in the morning and 15 at night.

***How hard must the exercise be?***

The guidelines say you should aim for ***moderate*** exercise.

***What does that mean?***

A ***brisk walk*** is moderate. Moderate exercise does not mean you have to get out the lycra gear and head for the gym. You should be able to hold a conversation whilst exercising i.e. not be out of breath.

***Do I need to be fit to start this?***

No. However you should check with your GP if you are unsure about this. It is best to build up slowly. So you might think of starting with daily short walks.

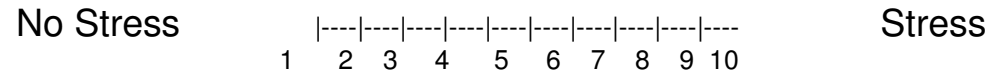
***Do you have to be young to start this?***

**No.** This can help all of us. If your GP has no concerns and if you start at the right level, then age is of no concern.

**Final words: Getting started is the hardest bit. Once you get into your stride, you will find yourself looking forward to both your PMR and exercise.**

### Stress Control: Relaxation diary

Before you play your CD, rate how stressful you feel using the 1-10 scale below. A score of 10 would mean your stress could not be worse. A score of 1 would mean you were not under any stress. Your score will probably be somewhere in between. When the CD ends, rate your stress again using the same scale. You should also make some notes about how you got on listening to the CD. Look at the example below.



	Time and place	Stress level before playing tape	Stress level after playing tape	Comments
<b><u>Example</u></b>	7pm, in the back bedroom	7	5	Lost my concentration for a bit but got it back before the end. Getting the breathing sorted out now and I felt a bit better by the time the CD ended. I'll try relaxing like this at work
<b>Day 1</b>				
<b>Day 2</b>				
<b>Day 3</b>				
<b>Day 4</b>				
<b>Day 5</b>				
<b>Day 6</b>				

<b>Day 7</b>				
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<b>Day 30</b>				

