

# Managing Stress with Muscle Relaxation

## My Progress

- What steps have you taken toward your goal(s) this week?
- How were you able to achieve the steps?
- If not, what got in your way? How will you overcome that barrier?

## Let's Discuss

- What is a situation that triggered a symptom or stress for you in the last week?
- How did you manage it and how did it turn out?
- When you notice you are under stress, where do you feel it in your body?



## Terri's Story

"In order to get what I want in life I need to take steps toward my life goals and life can be stressful. Now that I know what stress feels like in my body, I can practice muscle relaxation to help me manage the tension I feel when I am in high stress situations."

— Terri, customer service representative and person in recovery from bipolar, cocaine, and alcohol use disorder

## Good to Know

- **We all experience stress in different ways** and the effects of stress can show up in our emotions, thoughts, behaviors, and bodies.
- **Many people notice signs of stress in the body** more easily than the other ways that stress shows up.
- Some physical signs like headaches or trouble sleeping are often connected to stress but many people don't know this. Keeping track of the connection between stress and your physical signs of stress can help you to know **your own unique stress-signals**.
- If you know what to look for, such as becoming aware of clenching your teeth or a racing heartbeat, **you can take action using skills and strategies** to reduce the stress and its effects on your life.
- Knowing how stress shows up in your body can help you monitor and manage stress levels better with skills and **strategies like muscle relaxation**.

## My Experiences

Terri found it helpful to be aware of when she was under stress and where she felt the stress in her body. With greater awareness of her body's reaction to stress she learned when it would be helpful to use a specific coping strategy to manage it well. How about you? What are your body's signs that you are under stress? On the next page check the box next to the signs you have noticed and make some notes about the situation that led to the stress.

Physical Signs of Stress	I have noticed this sign	What I was stressed about
Headache	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Difficulty falling asleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Increased need for sleep	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Sweating or feeling hot	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Rapid heartbeat	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Trembling or shaking	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Change in appetite	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Breathing rapidly or heavily	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/>	

Once Terri learned about their signs of stress, she was able to develop new ways of thinking about them. When our bodies are under stress, it can affect the thoughts that we have and make the stress worse. Changing our thoughts about the situation can help the body to relax and our stress levels to go down. Look at the provided examples and then try to come up with some of your own examples of old and new thoughts

OLD THOUGHT	NEW THOUGHT
I can't breathe. This is so bad. I can't handle it.	There goes the fast breathing, I must be under higher stress than I thought. I know what I can do to catch my breath.
I have so many headaches. I don't know why this is happening to me. It's unmanageable.	My headaches might be due to stress. What can I do to reduce the stress in my life?
They make me so mad, now I am all sweaty and it's all their fault.	I'm getting hot again, I must need a break from this conversation.

## Let's Practice Muscle Relaxation

**Muscle relaxation can be a great way of managing stress once it shows up in our body.** Muscle relaxation focuses on reducing the tension in our muscle groups throughout our body. By reducing the tension in the muscles, we can reduce our overall feeling of stress and the effects stress can have on our life. Many people find it helpful to practice muscle relaxation when they aren't stressed so they can use it more easily when they are.

### 1. Develop the steps of muscle relaxation:

- Lift both shoulders in a shrugging motion. Hold for three seconds. Relax.
- Raise both arms straight above your head interlacing your fingers. Hold. Relax.
- Tighten your stomach muscles. Hold three seconds. Relax.
- Grab on to your right knee and pull it toward you. Hold. Relax. Do the same with your left knee.
- Lift your feet and stretch your legs out. Rotate your ankles five times in both directions.

•Tip: Breath in when you are tensing your muscles. Breath out when you are relaxing them.

2. Watch your worker demonstrate the steps of the skill, then try it out together.
3. Discuss with your worker how the practice felt, what you did well, and how you might do it differently in the future.
4. Continue to practice and discuss with your worker.

### Next Steps

- What did you find helpful about our meeting today?
- What would you like to do for your next step toward your goal(s)?
- Practice muscle relaxation to prepare for a stressful situation.
- I'd like to do something else \_\_\_\_\_.