



This handout provides a script for paired muscle relaxation, part of the [TIPP](#) distress tolerance skill in Dialectical Behavior Therapy. Click the link or scan the QR code here to access a [video](#) using the same script.



Intro: Welcome. I'm Dr. Elizabeth Nick from ChoosingTherapy.com, and I'll be guiding you through a paired muscle relaxation exercise.

First, make sure you're sitting or lying comfortably. If you need to, uncross your arms or legs. Close your eyes or lower your gaze.

Our only goal in this exercise is to tense and tighten groups of muscles, hold the tension while breathing in, and release the tension while breathing out. When we purposely tense and release our muscles like this, we can make our bodies more relaxed than when we started. By bringing attention to the feeling in our relaxed muscles, we're also more likely to stay relaxed.

Let's get started.

First, note how distressed or tense you feel from 0, or not at all tense, to 10, extremely tense.

Now let's move through the muscle groups.

To start, make fists with your hands and bend your wrists towards yourself. Breathe in and squeeze your fingers into your palms. Notice the tension in your hands and wrists. Hold for 3, 2, 1 - now breathe out and let all the tension go. Think to yourself, "Relax," and notice the feeling of relaxation in your hands.

Now let's try the arms. Make fists again and pull them toward your shoulders. Breathe in and tighten each arm. Feel the tightness in your biceps and forearms. Just a few more seconds. Now breathe out and release your muscles. Feel the tension draining away and think, "Relax."

If you find that your mind is wandering, that's okay. Just gently bring your attention back to your body.

Now pull your shoulders up to your ears and breathe in. Feel your muscles pushing upwards. Notice what tension feels like in your shoulders. 3, 2, 1 - now breathe out and let your shoulders drop. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation and think, "Relax."

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*



Let's try the forehead. Breathe in and scrunch your eyebrows and wrinkle your forehead. What does tightness feel like here? Hold for a few more seconds, then breathe out and let the tension go. Feel your forehead smooth out and think to yourself, "Relax."

Now shut your eyes tightly. Take a breath in and hold the tension for 3, 2, 1. Let go and think to yourself, "Relax" as you breathe out. Focus your attention on how your eyes feel now.

Now scrunch your nose and pull your cheeks and lips upwards towards your eyes. Breathe in. Hold your face tight, then let go and breathe out. Tell yourself, "Relax" as you feel the tension drain away.

Now for the lips and lower face. Press your lips together and pull the corners of your lips back towards your ears. Breathe in. Hold the tension. Let go, breathe out, and think to yourself, "Relax."

Almost done with the face. Clench your teeth together and press your tongue to the roof of your mouth as you breathe in. Don't hurt your teeth, but hold the tension there. 3, 2, 1, release and relax. Breathe out and let your jaw open and your tongue relax. Notice how your jaw feels now.

Now onto the neck. If you're laying down, press your head back into the floor or your bed. If you're setting up, press your head back into the headrest of your chair, or you can pull your chin down towards your chest. Hold the tension and breathe in. Now think, "Relax" and let the tension go as you breathe out.

Now take a very deep, slow breath in to expand the chest. Hold the breath in and push your chest out a little more. Feel the tightness as you hold for 3, 2, 1. Let the breath out and think, "Relax." Notice how your torso relaxes as the breath flows out of your nose or mouth.

Next let's arch the back. Breathe in and bring your shoulder blades together. Open your arms if you'd like. Feel the stretch and the tension. Now release. Breathe out and think, "Relax."

For your stomach, squeeze all your ab muscles in. Feel your torso curl as you squeeze your muscles together and breathe in. 3, 2, 1, release and relax. Notice the difference between tightened stomach muscles and relaxed stomach muscles.

Next, squeeze your buttocks together. Breathe in and hold that tension in your glute muscles. Now release your muscles and your breath. Think, "Relax."

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Let's move down the legs. Stretch your legs out and take a breath in. Squeeze the muscles in your thighs. Hold... now breathe out and think, "Relax." Focus on what relaxation feels like in your legs.

Two more muscle groups to go. Breathe in and stretch your legs back out. This time, point your toes. Feel the tension in your calves for 3, 2, 1, let go. Relax and breathe out.

Let's tense the ankles. Stretch your legs out and curl your toes. Now point your toes together and your heels out. Breathe in, hold the tension, and breathe out. Release your ankles and legs and think to yourself, "Relax."

Finally, let's tense a few groups of muscles at a time.

To start, make fists with your hands, squeeze your arms, and pull your shoulders up... Hold here... and... relax.

Now scrunch up your forehead, nose, and mouth, and clench your jaw... Hold the tension... and... relax.

Now, pull your chin down to your chest to tense your neck, take in a deep breath and hold it there, and arch your back... Hold the tension... and... relax.

Tense your abs, glutes, legs, and calves... Keep all these muscles tense... and... relax.

Tense your whole body, all your muscles... Hold them all for 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 - relax.

Nice job. Paired muscle relaxation can be challenging, but with practice, your body will know how to relax its muscles automatically when you take a deep breath in, let it out, and think "Relax."

Note how you're feeling from 0-10 again. If you're not feeling more relaxed, take a moment to take stock of your whole body. Figure out which muscles are still holding tension, and focus your attention there. Try tensing and releasing those muscles again.



Additional Resources to Support Your Mental Health Journey

It can be hard to know where to begin looking for support in your mental health journey. Getting a referral from a primary care physician is a reliable first step. Also, sometimes family and friends have experienced similar issues and have professionals they would recommend. The experts at ChoosingTherapy.com are here to help as well, with resources we have reviewed and recommend. Our [strict editorial standards](#) ensure our reviews are fair, honest, thorough, and based on firsthand experience.

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325+
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3,625+
Hours of Firsthand Experience



1,545+
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[Best Online Therapy](#)

Online therapy is a convenient way to connect with a licensed therapist to address mental health issues, reduce unhealthy behaviors, develop effective coping skills, and get more satisfaction out of life. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.

[Best Online Psychiatry](#)

Online psychiatry providers enable patients to consult with licensed psychiatrists and other mental health professionals. They can evaluate, diagnose, and prescribe medication to help manage mental health issues. Many companies accept insurance and most have next-day appointments available.



[Best Mental Health Apps](#)

Apps can be great way to monitor mood, track sleep, journal, and practice healthy coping skills like mindfulness and meditation. There are apps specifically designed to help people reduce the symptoms of depression, anxiety, ADHD, chronic stress, and burnout.

[Therapist Directory](#)

When you're looking for a mental health provider with a very particular skill set, level of experience, or personality type, a therapist directory can be very helpful. Using the filters, you can refine your search until you find a therapist who feels like a perfect fit.





Tools for Self-Assessment and Psychoeducation

Figuring out the next step in your mental health journey can be overwhelming. Developed by psychologists, the tools at [ChoosingTherapy.com](https://www.ChoosingTherapy.com) can help. Our mental health self-assessment quizzes can help you explore common symptoms of mental health concerns, as well as find the best therapy style for you. Our mental health worksheets can guide you through therapy concepts and how to use them in your life.

[Learn More with Mental Health Quizzes](#)

Our collection of psychologist-developed mental health quizzes can help you learn if you are experiencing mild, moderate, or concerning levels of anxiety, depression, stress, burnout, and more. Each quiz also provides targeted resources based on your answers. These self-assessments are designed to offer insight, not diagnoses, and can be a helpful first step in recognizing symptoms and deciding whether to seek further support. If you have concerns about your mental health or your quiz results, we recommend you reach out to a licensed mental health professional.



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