



The Stress Workbook

Table of Contents

Page 3

Questionnaire: Are you stressed?

Defining Stress

Eustress

Distress

Acute Stress

Chronic Stress

Pages 4-5

Progressive Muscular Relaxation Technique

What is it?

Why should you do it?

Who should or should not do it?

How to do it?

Page 6

Positive Self-Esteem

What is self-esteem?

What causes it to change?

How to promote positive self-esteem?

Page 7

Other Therapies - Pet Therapy

What is it?

What are the benefits?

Page 8

Meditation

History and Beginnings

Why meditate?

Ways to meditate

Page 9

Imagery and Visualization

What is it?

How can it be used for relaxation?

Page 10

Time Management

What is it?

The Eisenhower Matrix

Pages 11-13

References

Questionnaire

1. How much sleep do you get on average each night?
2. Are there specific times when you feel more or less stressed?
3. Do you have people that you can talk to when you are feeling overwhelmed or stressed?
4. Do you participate in any physical activities, such as working out, yoga, dancing, etc.?
5. How do you usually unwind each day? (Do you have any hobbies?)
6. What do your daily eating habits look like?

Eustress vs. Distress

I personally distinguish eustress and distress by thinking eustress = euphoric and distress = difficult. By this, it helps me remember that eustress is considered a “good” stress that will motivate a person. Examples of this kind of stress would be things like planning a wedding or preparing for a baby. Both have positive outcomes, but they can be overwhelming in the process. Eustress is generally followed by a sense of accomplishment once the initial task is completed. Eustress has the possibility to improve physical health as you feel better about yourself and your accomplishments. On the other end of the spectrum is distress. This is considered a “bad” stress. Distress is more related to the feeling of hopelessness and discouragement. These feelings can occur during a breakup of a relationship or the loss of a job. It can potentially cause long-term effects on the body if not properly addressed (The American Institute of Stress, 2025).

Acute vs. Chronic Stress

Acute and chronic stress are relatively straightforward as well. An acute stress is short-term or immediate. It is a fight-or-flight response. This stress will usually be accompanied by an increased heart rate and higher adrenaline levels. Acute stress can be caused by little things like arguments or minor injuries. These things are temporary and will usually get better. Chronic stress, on the other hand, is a prolonged exposure to stressors. Stressors like this include abuse of any kind or a very demanding lifestyle. If left unaddressed, chronic stress can take a toll on the body. It can affect the heart and put a strain on it. The immune system can also be weakened. Most people have been found to have increased depression and anxiety when dealing with chronic stress (Chu et al., 2024).

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

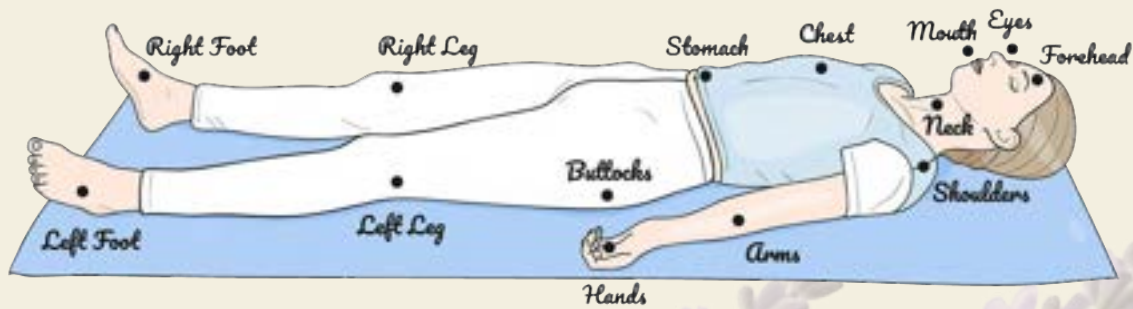
What, why, and who?

PMR is a relaxation method used for stress management. It was developed by Dr. Edmund Jacobson during the early 1900s. PMR has been found to assist in lowering stress and provide almost immediate relief from anxiety. It has also been used to aid in treating things like tension headaches, backaches, high blood pressure, TMJ, and insomnia (Conrad & Roth, 2006). Progressive muscular relaxation is a technique that can increase the awareness of how your body feels tension. It generally takes between ten and twenty minutes to complete. This technique should not be done by those who suffer from chronic pain, severe muscle spasms, serious physical injuries, or those who have just had recent surgeries. Occasionally, those with a severe anxiety disorder may have adverse reactions. If any pain begins, stop the session immediately.

How?

PMR is performed by systematically tensing and then releasing specific muscle groups, which trigger "top down" and "bottom up" neural processing. "Top down" neural processing uses the cerebral cortex and the cerebellum, while "bottom up" neural processing produces proprioceptive stimulation in the peripheral muscles (Toussaint et al., 2021). To do this technique, you should be in a quiet and relaxing environment if possible. Try to make yourself as comfortable as possible. Once comfortable, you should regulate your breathing. From here, you can begin the process of tensing the muscle groups, starting with your toes. You should feel the tension in these muscles without feeling pain and hold it for five seconds. Inhale while tensing. After that, exhale and release the muscles. Wait for about ten seconds before moving on to the next set of muscles (Centre for Clinical Interventions, n.d.). Below is a sequence to follow.

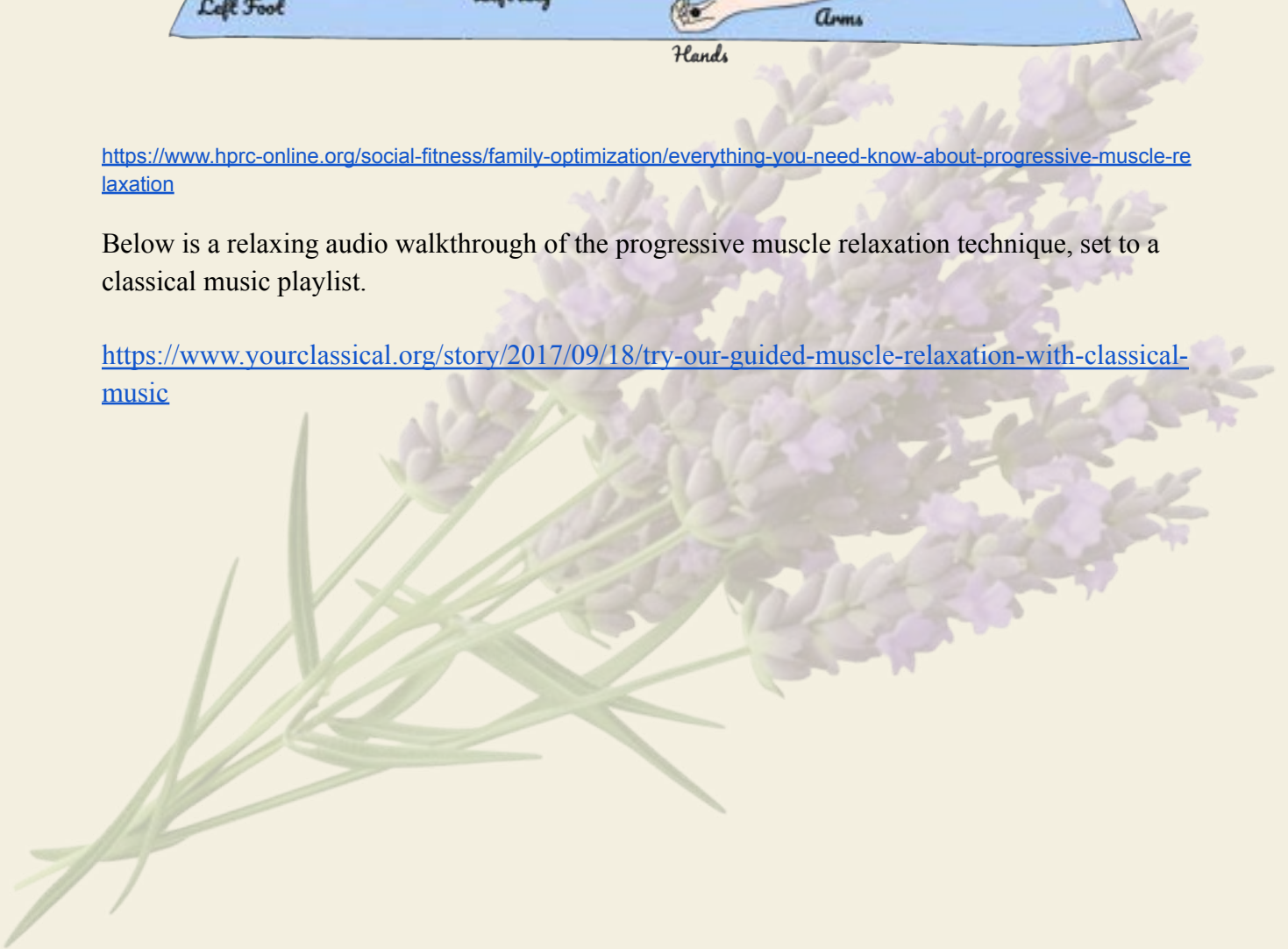
1. Toes: curl your toes downward.
2. Feet: point your feet down
3. Calves: point your toes up (flex your feet)
4. Thighs: squeeze your thighs together
5. Pelvis/Hips: Squeeze glutes together
6. Hands: make fists
7. Stomach: tighten abdominal muscles
8. Chest: tighten chest muscles
9. Back: tighten upper back muscles - bring shoulder blades together
10. Neck: tighten neck muscles (be careful with this step)
11. Face: tighten jaw, then eyes, then forehead



<https://www.hprc-online.org/social-fitness/family-optimization/everything-you-need-know-about-progressive-muscle-relaxation>

Below is a relaxing audio walkthrough of the progressive muscle relaxation technique, set to a classical music playlist.

<https://www.yourclassical.org/story/2017/09/18/try-our-guided-muscle-relaxation-with-classical-music>



Positive Self-Esteem

Self-esteem. What is it? Self-esteem is a person's individual subjective view of their own worth. A person's self-esteem does not actually reflect an individual's competencies, though (*Self-esteem*, 2026). Having low self-esteem can cause a person to be unhappy in life. Symptoms or signs of low self-esteem may manifest as a lack of boundaries, avoiding challenges, an inability to keep up with self-care, and negatively comparing oneself in social environments (Rcc, 2025). It affects their confidence and other aspects of their daily life as well. An individual's self-esteem can be both positively and negatively affected. Negative impacts on one's self-esteem may include things like ongoing stressors, childhood trauma, poor treatment in relationships, or chronic illness and pain. Rebuilding self-esteem can take some work depending on the situation. However, it is entirely possible to do so. Some ways to do this may include avoiding terms like "should" and "must", stepping back from your thoughts and looking at which ones are upsetting you rather than encouraging you, taking time for self-care, and making sure to acknowledge the positive points of the day, such as compliments or even small achievements (Department of Health & Human Services, n.d.). By doing things like the ones previously listed, a person can improve their self-esteem, therefore improving their quality of life. By this, I mean a person's mental health, relationships, and outlook can all be improved.

Below, I have added a link to a short, 5-minute video that will guide you through a meditation that encourages you to release the negative self-judgement and encourages positive and healthier confidence.

[Self Love ~ A Five Minute Guided Meditation](#)



Alternative Therapy - Pet Therapy

Pets are loved around the world and can range from normal domestic pets like a cat or a dog to more exotic things like a snake, a hedgehog, or even a bat. Pets are much more than just a cute little critter in a home. They have the ability to lower stress levels, increase heart health, and assist with both emotional and social skills (*The Power of Pets*, 2024). Animal-assisted therapy dates all the way back to the 18th century. During that time, they began to introduce animals into mental health institutions in order to give patients some social interaction. Moving through history, many different kinds of programs have been created that have brought animals into different areas to assist with things like trauma, autism, posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, and depression. Dogs in particular are used as therapy pets in medical situations due to their ability to interpret social cues as well as being sensitive to humans' emotional states (Pandey et al., 2024). Benefits associated with pet therapy have been found to include lowering cortisol levels while increasing oxytocin levels, improving social engagement, lowering cardiac disease risk, and contributing to lower blood pressure, cholesterol, and triglyceride levels within the body (VA.gov | *Veterans Affairs*, n.d.-c). The image below shows the positive effects that animals have had in a household found during a survey of 19,000 individuals done by the Human Animal Bond Research Institute. Of the 19,000 people that were surveyed, only about 2% of them felt as though they did not get any of the positive effects from a household pet.



Meditation

When you are already stressed or constantly in motion, it is hard to think about adding yet another thing to your routine. Another thing to remember, another thing to take time to do, just another thing in general. But what if that one thing to add is something that can be the difference between burnout and peace? Meditation can be that one thing. So, what is meditation, and where did it come from? Meditation is a relaxation practice that focuses on calming the mind, as well as improving your overall well-being. This can be done by focusing on sensations or practicing mindfulness (*Meditation and Mindfulness: Effectiveness and Safety*, n.d.). The practice of meditation dates back to around 5,000 BCE. There are ties to many different cultures, including Ancient Egypt, China, Judaism, Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism, and Buddhism. However, it did not gain traction in Western civilization until the 20th century, specifically the 1990s (*Wellness@NIH -Meditation or Is It Mindfulness a Practitioners Lens of Some Differences, Similarities and Where to Begin*, n.d.). Meditation can be useful for a multitude of reasons. It is shown that those who meditate are able to lower their stress and cortisol levels, increase their moods, regulate their emotions, enhance their cognitive function, and regulate their pain levels, sleep, and anxiety or depression symptoms (Professional, 2026). There are different types of meditation that can be done depending on the person. It can be something as simple as repeating a mantra that can comfort you or be uplifting, or even just being mindful of your thoughts and what is going on in your mind. By doing this, you can redirect to your current surroundings. Transcendental meditation focuses on sound. It uses monosyllabic sounds. Compassion meditation is self-love and love towards others, whether they reciprocate it or not. The last form of mediation is mindful movement. This is where things like running, weightlifting, or yoga come into play. Your body can relax while doing a repetitive movement. Yoga is one of the big ones. There are many different kinds of yoga for people to try. One new one that is gaining attention for fantasy readers is sword yoga. You not only focus on your breathing, but it also trains you to have awareness around you and how your brain adapts to treat the sword as an extension of your body (Sabina, 2025). The link below will direct you to a short, 7-minute guided meditation to start the day with. You can start with something simple like this and then work up to something longer as you get comfortable.

▶ 7-Minute Meditation to Start Your Day

Mental Imagery and Visualization

Stress continues to be a huge part of people's daily lives. Some people are able to cope better than others, and for those of us who need a little help, there are tools and guides that can be found in numerous places. Mental imagery and visualization are two of these tools. Mental imagery involves using your mind to picture relaxing or peaceful scenes. Picturing somewhere that makes you feel at ease and safe is key here. By doing this, the body can begin to relax. Mental imagery is often coupled with relaxing breathing techniques in order to bring your body and mind back into focus. Visualization is another tool that can be used. Similar to mental imagery, visualization is done by picturing in your mind. Instead of picturing a nice, relaxing scene, it is used almost like manifesting. Visualization is done by breathing and picturing the success or change you wish to see in life (Krau, 2020). Being able to visualize this change and this positivity can bring a sense of calm and relaxation. It can help you push to achieve your goals. When using either of these tools, it is recommended to do so in a quiet and calm environment. Do not do them while driving or operating any sort of machinery, as this can cause distraction and lead to injury. Below is a link to a guided mental imagery session. Also, below are some examples of mental imagery. Not everyone will picture the same scenes, and that is okay. It is supposed to be what makes you feel relaxed, not what you think should make you feel relaxed.

 [Guided Imagery](#)



Time Management

Effective time management skills can be critical in terms of stress management. Time management is defined as a person possessing the ability to use one's time both effectively and productively (Aeon et al., 2021). Ineffective time management can lead to things like constantly feeling behind, a reduced quality of work, mental fog, and burnout. Burnout is feeling exhausted, unhappy, or just overall empty (Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG), 2024). The good news is that there are ways to master time management. Some of these include prioritizing tasks, setting strict schedules, creating to-do lists, and using the Eisenhower Matrix. The Eisenhower Matrix, or the Urgent-Important Matrix, was created by Dwight D. Eisenhower to help him organize tasks due to being a general in the Army, a Supreme Commander in the Allied Forces during World War II, President of the United States, and later the first Supreme Commander for NATO. This matrix is used by dividing tasks into four different quadrants. These four quadrants are: Urgent-Important, Not Urgent-Important, Urgent-Not Important, and Not Urgent-Not Important. Breaking these down further, the Urgent-Important quadrant is used for tasks that are deemed most important and need to be done the same day. The Not Urgent-Important quadrant is used for tasks that can just be scheduled to be done and completed at a later time. The Urgent-Not Important quadrant is used for tasks that still need to be completed but can be completed by someone else. These can be delegated. The final quadrant, Not Urgent-Not Important, is used for tasks that really just do not need to be completed at all and can be eliminated from the list (Eisenhower, 2017). Below is a link that provides a tutorial for the Eisenhower Matrix.

[▶ The Eisenhower matrix: How to manage your tasks with EISENHOWER](#)



References:

Aeon, B., Faber, A., & Panaccio, A. (2021). Does time management work? A meta-analysis.

PLoS ONE, 16(1), e0245066. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0245066>

The American Institute of Stress. (2025, October 8). *Eustress vs. distress: What is the difference?*

- *The American Institute of Stress*.

https://www.stress.org/news/eustress-vs-distress-what-is-the-difference/?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=22321858756&gbraid=0AAAAAoNlCyVGF4abu16qIOfcmYSJUINK1&gclid=CjwKCAiA95fLBhBPEiwATXUsxIvhunES9GwfBaXnVHiY92vB2e9CAtefvX4ZCtj2EXvOg_LYNHnX6BoC3ZAQAvD_BwE

Centre for Clinical Interventions. (n.d.). *Muscle tension*.

<https://www.cci.health.wa.gov.au/-/media/CCI/Mental-Health-Professionals/Panic/Panic--Information-Sheets/Panic-Information-Sheet---05---Progressive-Muscle-Relaxation.pdf>

Chen, Y. L., & Francis, A. J. (2009). Relaxation and imagery for chronic, nonmalignant pain: effects on pain symptoms, quality of life, and mental health. *Pain Management Nursing*,

11(3), 159–168. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pmn.2009.05.005>

Chu, B., Marwaha, K., Sanvictores, T., Awosika, A. O., & Ayers, D. (2024, May 7). *Physiology, stress reaction*. StatPearls - NCBI Bookshelf.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK541120/>

Conrad, A., & Roth, W. T. (2006). Muscle relaxation therapy for anxiety disorders: It works but how? *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 21(3), 243–264.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2006.08.001>

Department of Health & Human Services. (n.d.). *Self esteem*. Better Health Channel.

<https://www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au/health/healthyliving/self-esteem>

Eisenhower. (2017, February 7). *The Eisenhower Matrix: Introduction & 3-Minute Video Tutorial*. Eisenhower -. <https://www.eisenhower.me/eisenhower-matrix/>

Human-Animal Bond Research Institute. (2023, November 3). *International Survey of Pet Owners & Veterinarians* | HABRI. HABRI. <https://habri.org/international-hab-survey/>

Institute for Quality and Efficiency in Health Care (IQWiG). (2024, April 15). *Depression: Learn More – What is burnout?* InformedHealth.org - NCBI Bookshelf.
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK279286/>

Krau, S. D. (2020). The multiple uses of guided imagery. *Nursing Clinics of North America*, 55(4), 467–474. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cnur.2020.06.013>

Meditation and mindfulness: effectiveness and safety. (n.d.). NCCIH.
<https://www.nccih.nih.gov/health/meditation-and-mindfulness-effectiveness-and-safety>

Orth, U., & Robins, R. W. (2022). Is high self-esteem beneficial? Revisiting a classic question. *American Psychologist*, 77(1), 5–17. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000922>

Pandey, R. P., Himanshu, Gunjan, Mukherjee, R., & Chang, C. (2024). The role of Animal-Assisted Therapy in Enhancing Patients' Well-Being: Systematic study of the qualitative and quantitative evidence. *JMIRx Med*, 5, e51787.
<https://doi.org/10.2196/51787>

Pearson, J., Naselaris, T., Holmes, E. A., & Kosslyn, S. M. (2015). Mental imagery: functional mechanisms and clinical applications. *Trends in Cognitive Sciences*, 19(10), 590–602.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tics.2015.08.003>

(Pearson et al., 2015)

Professional, C. C. M. (2026, March 12). *Meditation*. Cleveland Clinic.
<https://my.clevelandclinic.org/health/articles/17906-meditation>

Rcc, P. S. M. (2025, January 9). *9 Signs of Low Self-Esteem. Well Beings Counselling.*

<https://wellbeingscounselling.ca/9-signs-of-low-self-esteem/>

Sabina. (2025, May 7). *How the Sword Rewires Your Brain and Becomes An Extension of Your Body.*

<https://weaponup.com/blog/how-the-sword-rewires-your-brain-and-becomes-an-extension-of-your-body>

self-esteem. (2026). <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/self-esteem>

The power of pets. (2024, June 17). NIH News in Health.

<https://newsinhealth.nih.gov/2018/02/power-pets>

Toussaint, L., Nguyen, Q. A., Roettger, C., Dixon, K., Offenbacher, M., Kohls, N., Hirsch, J., &

Sirois, F. (2021). Effectiveness of progressive muscle relaxation, deep breathing, and guided imagery in promoting psychological and physiological states of relaxation.

Evidence-based Complementary and Alternative Medicine, 2021, 1–8.

<https://doi.org/10.1155/2021/5924040>

VA.gov | *Veterans Affairs.* (n.d.-c).

<https://www.va.gov/WHOLEHEALTHLIBRARY/tools/animal-assisted-therapies.asp>

Wellness@NIH - *Meditation or is it Mindfulness A practitioners lens of some differences,*

similarities and where to begin. (n.d.).

<https://wellnessatnih.ors.od.nih.gov/news/Pages/Meditation-or-is-it-Mindfulness--A-practitioners-lens-of-some-differences,-similarities-and-where-to-begin.aspx>