

## **Progressive Muscle Relaxation**

This is an opportunity to positively affect all of your muscles, and increase awareness of when they are tense and what it feels like when they are relaxed. For each muscle group first bring your awareness to that area and *just notice what it feels like*. Then do the tightening and releasing as described. You may notice a tendency to hold your breath as you tighten the various muscle groups. Make an effort to continue breathing and keep your belly relaxed as you tense surrounding muscles.

### How to practice Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Begin by focusing attention on your forehead, noticing what it feels like. Then consciously tighten the muscles of your forehead for about 5 seconds, lifting the eyebrows as high as possible. You are holding the forehead muscles as tight as you can, but not to a point of causing any pain. Then let go of the tension and take a deep breath. If you have time, it is useful to repeat each muscle group twice – tensing and relaxing.

Next, move to your eyes, closing and tightening the muscles around your eyes, again for about 5 seconds, and then releasing and breathing deeply. Repeat.

Move to each area of the body, including:

- **Jaw**  
Bite down and pull the corners of your mouth down
- **Neck**  
Imagine you are holding a golf ball between your chin and chest, pulling your chin down toward your **back, chest and shoulders** – for the first tensing, pull both shoulders up and back and for the second tensing, up and forward
- **Hands and arms**  
Make a fist and tighten arm muscles
- **Abdomen**  
For the first tensing, pull stomach in tightly, and for the second tensing push it out
- **Buttocks**  
Tighten and release
- **Legs including the foot** (which you can point upward)  
If seated, straighten and lift legs in front of you with heels pushing out and toes toward you
- **Feet**  
Push out on the balls of the feet and spread toes, then curl toes under.
- End by tightening the **whole body**, releasing and then **breathing deeply** for 10 breaths.