

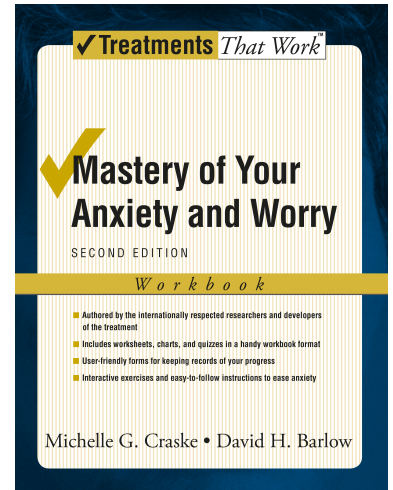
# WORKBOOK

## Mastery Of Your Anxiety And Worry

Second Edition

Michelle G. Craske

David H. Barlow



---

## CHAPTER 5

# Learning to Relax

---

PSYCHOLOGY**TOOLS**

This resource has been created by Psychology Tools and is based on a chapter from *Mastery Of Your Anxiety And Worry (Second Edition)* published by Oxford University Press. © 2006 by Oxford University Press, Inc.

✓ TREATMENTS THAT WORK



WITH CONTENT FROM  
**OXFORD**  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

# Chapter 5 *Learning to Relax*

---

## Goals

---

- To review your records from the previous week and add data to your Progress Record
- To learn progressive muscle relaxation training
- To fill out the Relaxation Record on a weekly basis
- To continue record-keeping
- To complete the self-assessment

## Review of Your Records

---

Before you start this chapter, review your Worry Records and Daily Mood Record. If you have stopped keeping your records, remember that recording your thoughts, behaviors, and symptoms is an essential part of this program. Without the records, you will not be able to evaluate your own reactions or tailor the anxiety control strategies to your own particular anxiety. So, it is really to your benefit to continue the record-keeping. In addition, we recommend that you do not continue until you fully understand all of the material presented in the previous chapters. If you have questions, either reread the section or ask your mental health professional for clarification. Since so much of this program is based on learning new principles, it is very important that you fully understand the reasons for everything that you will be asked to do.

From your records, what do you notice about the previous week? In particular, what are the typical themes of your worry, and what are the positive feedback loops among your thoughts, physical symptoms, and behaviors? Add the number of episodes of anxiety and average maximum anxiety rat-

---

ings to the Progress Record. Do not worry if the averages have not changed yet. You are still in the learning phase of this program. The application phase will begin with this chapter.

## Progressive Muscle Relaxation

---

In the previous chapter, physical tension was described as one of the factors that both contributes to and results from worry and anxiety. For this reason, learning to relax physically is one pathway to interrupting the cycle of anxiety and worry.

People relax in many different ways. Some people sit quietly and listen to music, and others practice yoga or some other form of meditation. A procedure that we find to be very useful is called “progressive muscle relaxation training.”

This method has two components: one for physical relaxation and one for mental relaxation. Physical relaxation is taught through a series of muscular tensing and releasing exercises. It begins with 16 different muscle groups, and then, with practice, decreases to eight muscle groups, and then to four muscle groups, before finally being reduced to relaxation in one step. Mental relaxation is taught through learning to focus your attention on the sensations that you experience during the tensing and releasing exercises.

Initially, the procedure takes approximately 30 minutes. As the number of specific muscle groups is reduced, the procedure becomes shorter. Eventually, the goal is to relax in one step. However, as with any new behavioral procedure, relaxation is a skill that takes considerable practice. Therefore, achieving one-step relaxation requires time and effort.

The advantage of the one-step method of relaxation is that it can be used to interrupt anxiety as soon as tension starts to build. However, the lengthier, more extensive 30-minute version of relaxation is a very useful general strategy for letting go of tension that has accumulated during the day. Even though you will learn how to shorten the relaxation procedure progressively so that it can become an applied skill, it will be valuable to continue to practice the longer versions as well.

As described in the last chapter, the combination of high levels of physical tension and negative thinking contribute to the persistence of worry and

anxiety. By learning a method to reduce your level of physical tension, it will be easier for you to control your worrying. Relaxation should become a regular part of your daily schedule. Your initial response might be, “I don’t have time to relax. There are far too many other things that have to get done!” This sense of time pressure only adds to your anxiety. Changing your schedule and taking the time to relax will not only lower physical tension, but also will teach you a very important lesson, which is that most of the things you believe have to get done can wait.

Now let’s discuss the procedure itself. By the way, if you are already using a specific relaxation strategy that you find effective, it’s not necessary for you to learn the procedure we describe here. Nevertheless, you should read through the remainder of the relaxation sections of this book to ensure that you are following all of the principles. Also, if you have tried one form of relaxation and it did not work, don’t assume that it will not work this time. It may not have worked for a lot of reasons that you were not fully aware of, but that can be corrected with practice.

Initially, the exercise involves tensing the muscles, followed by releasing or relaxing. The tensing has two purposes. First, the tension-relaxation procedure acts like a pendulum: the further you pull it one way (tension), the further it will go the other way (relaxation), and therefore, relaxation is made easier. Second, the tensing exercises provide a strong contrast with the relaxation part of the procedure so that you can learn to discriminate very clearly between tension and relaxation. Sometimes tension builds gradually, without our awareness. Learning to detect the initial signs of an increase in tension will put you in a better position to use relaxation as a tool early on, rather than waiting for anxiety and tension to reach high levels.

The tensing part of the exercises is not intended to produce pain. In fact, if you experience chronic pain in any part of your body, it is best to avoid the tensing component for the muscles in that area; just do the relaxing component when you get to those muscle groups.

The procedure asks you to tense and release different muscle groups in sequence. We start with the arms and then move to the legs, stomach, chest, shoulders, neck, and face. During the tensing part of the exercises, you should tense only the specified muscle group, keeping the rest of your body relaxed. Of course, some overlap is unavoidable; for example, it is difficult to

avoid tensing your lower arms when you tense your upper arms. However, some parts of your body can fairly easily remain relaxed as you tense other parts of your body; for example, it is easy to relax your face and your legs as you tense your arms.

Throughout the exercise, concentrate on the sensations produced by tensing and releasing different muscle groups. You can do this by repeatedly telling yourself, “Think about the feelings in my arm, feel the tension and tightness. . . . Feel the warmth of releasing the tension.” Other thoughts may enter your mind, particularly worrisome thoughts. Don’t get upset or try to get rid of these thoughts. Instead, gently bring your concentration back to the physical sensations. By redirecting your attention, you will learn to dismiss worrisome thoughts; that is, even though the worrisome thoughts may still be present, the fact that you are not giving them all of your attention and, instead, directing your attention to the physical sensations of relaxation, will mean that you are teaching yourself that those worrisome thoughts are not important and that you are not controlled by them.

As with the learning of any new skill, it is helpful to begin practicing in environments in which you will not be distracted and at times that you have specifically set aside for relaxation. Later on, you will be asked to practice relaxing in more distracting places, so that you can eventually use relaxation as a strategy wherever you are when you notice tension building. For the moment, however, find a quiet place where you know you will not be distracted or disturbed. If you have children, do the relaxation exercise when they are asleep, at school, or being looked after by someone else. A high-backed, comfortable chair that provides support for your neck is ideal, but lying on a bed is okay, as long as you do not fall asleep. Loosen tight clothing, including shoes or belts, and uncross your legs or arms. If you wear glasses or contact lenses, remove them before going ahead with the exercise.

The following exercise should be practiced every day, twice a day, for the next seven days. Initially, that means 30 minutes twice a day. This is necessary in order to really learn how to relax. Do not expect major changes at first. With practice, you will feel the effects of relaxation.

Read the following set of instructions very carefully. If possible, record the instructions on an audiotape. When you’re ready to practice, you can follow your own taped instructions.

## The Relaxation Procedure

Get into a comfortable position, close your eyes, and sit quietly for a few seconds, taking some slow, deep breaths.

1. Build up the tension in your lower arms by making fists with your hands and pulling up on your wrists. If your nails are long, press your fingers against your palms to make fists. Feel the tension through your lower arms, wrists, fingers, knuckles, and hands. Focus on the tension. Notice the sensations of pulling, of discomfort, of tightness. Hold the tension (10 seconds). Now, release the tension and let your hands and lower arms relax onto the chair or bed, with your palms facing down. Focus your attention on the sensations of relaxation in your hands and arms. Feel the release from tension. Relax the muscles (20 seconds), and as you relax, breathe smoothly and slowly from your abdomen. Each time you exhale, think the word “relax.”
2. Now, build up the tension in your upper arms by pulling your arms back and in, toward your sides. Feel the tension in the back of your arms and radiating up into your shoulders and back. Focus on the sensations of tension. Hold the tension (10 seconds). Now, release your arms and let them relax. Focus on your upper arms, and feel the difference compared with the tension. Your arms might feel heavy, warm, and relaxed. As you relax (20 seconds), breathe smoothly and slowly from your abdomen. Each time you exhale, think the word “relax.”
3. Now, build up the tension in your lower legs by flexing your feet and pulling your toes toward your upper body. Feel the tension as it spreads through your feet, ankles, shins, and calves. Focus on the tension spreading down the back of your leg, into your foot, under your foot, and around your toes. Concentrate on that part of your body (10 seconds). Now, release the tension. Let your legs relax heavily onto the chair or bed. Feel the difference in the muscles as they relax. Feel the release from tension, the sense of comfort, and the warmth and heaviness of relaxation (20 seconds). As you breathe smoothly and slowly, think the word “relax” each time you exhale.
4. Build up the tension in your upper legs by pulling your knees together and lifting your legs off of the bed or chair. Focus on the

tightness in your upper legs. Feel the pulling sensations from the hip down, and notice the tension in your legs. Focus on that part of your body (10 seconds). Now, release the tension, and let your legs drop down heavily onto the chair or bed. Let the tension go away. Concentrate on the feeling of relaxation. Feel the difference in your legs. Focus on the feeling of comfort (20 seconds), and as you breathe smoothly and slowly, think the word “relax” each time you exhale.

5. Now, build up the tension in your stomach by pulling your stomach in toward your spine very tightly. Feel the tension. Feel the tightness, and focus on that part of your body (10 seconds). Now, let your stomach relax outwards. Let it go further and further. Feel the sense of warmth circulating across your stomach. Feel the comfort of relaxation (20 seconds). As you breathe smoothly and slowly, think the word “relax” each time you exhale.
6. Now, build up the tension around your chest by taking a deep breath and holding it. Your chest is expanded, and the muscles are stretched around it. Feel the tension in your chest and back. Hold your breath (10 seconds). Now, slowly, let the air escape and breathe normally, letting the air flow in and out smoothly and easily. Feel the difference as the muscles relax compared with the tension, and think the word “relax” each time you exhale.
7. Imagine that your shoulders are on strings and are pulled up toward your ears. Feel the tension around your shoulders, radiating down into your back and up into your neck and the back of your head. Focus on this part of your body. Concentrate on the sensations around your neck and shoulders (10 seconds), and then let your shoulders droop. Relax and let them droop further and further. Feel the sense of relaxation around your neck and shoulders. Concentrate on the sensation of relaxation (20 seconds) in this part of your body. As you breathe smoothly and slowly, think the word “relax” each time you exhale.
8. Build up the tension around your neck by pressing the back of your neck toward the chair or bed and pulling your chin down toward your chest. Feel the tightness around the back of your neck spreading up into the back of your head. Focus on the tension (10 seconds). Now, release the tension, letting your head rest comfortably against the bed or chair. Concentrate on the relaxation (20 seconds), and feel

the difference from the tension. As you breathe smoothly and slowly, think the word “relax” each time you exhale.

9. Build up the tension around your mouth, jaw, and throat by clenching your teeth and forcing the corners of your mouth back into a forced smile (10 seconds). Feel the tightness, and concentrate on the sensations. Then, release the tension, letting your mouth drop open and the muscles around your throat and jaw relax. Concentrate on the difference in the sensations in that part of your body (20 seconds). As you breathe smoothly and slowly, think the word “relax” each time you exhale.
10. Build up the tension around your eyes by squeezing your eyes tightly shut for a few seconds, and then releasing. Then, let the tension around your eyes slide away. Feel the difference as the muscles relax (20 seconds). As you breathe smoothly and slowly, think the word “relax” each time you exhale.
11. Build up the tension across your lower forehead by frowning, pulling your eyebrows down and toward the center. Feel the tension across your forehead and the top of your head. Concentrate on the tension (10 seconds), and then release, smoothing out the wrinkles and letting your forehead relax. Feel the difference as you relax (20 seconds). As you breathe smoothly and slowly, think the word “relax” each time you exhale.
12. Build up the tension across your upper forehead by raising your eyebrows as high as you can. Feel the wrinkling and pulling sensations across your forehead and the top of your head. Hold the tension (10 seconds), and then relax, letting your eyebrows rest and the tension leave. Concentrate on the sensations of relaxation, and feel the difference in comparison to tension. As you breathe smoothly and slowly, think the word “relax” each time you exhale.
13. Now your whole body is feeling relaxed and comfortable. As you feel yourself becoming even more relaxed, count from one to five. One, letting all of the tension leave your body. Two, sinking further and further into relaxation. Three, feeling more and more relaxed. Four, feeling very relaxed. Five, feeling deeply relaxed. As you spend a few minutes in this relaxed state, think about your breathing. Feel the cool air as you breathe in and the warm air as you breathe out. Your breathing is slow and regular. Every time you breathe out, think the



word “relax” (2 minutes). Now, count backward from five, gradually feeling yourself become more alert and awake. Five, feeling more awake. Four, coming out of the relaxation. Three, feeling more alert. Two, opening your eyes. One, sitting up.

Once you learn to do this set of exercises, it is very possible that you will lower your heart rate and blood pressure. For that reason, do not stand up quickly afterward. Now, practice the exercise.

After going through the full set of tensing and releasing exercises, evaluate your experience. Were there any parts of your body that were difficult to relax? For very tense parts of your body, it may help to tense and release several times. Were you able to focus your attention? Remember that equally important as physical relaxation is mental relaxation, or learning to shift your attention away from worrisome thoughts and onto the physical sensations associated with the tension and relaxation exercises. If other thoughts enter your mind, let them pass, and redirect your attention to the physical sensations of relaxation. It doesn't matter if the worrisome thoughts remain in the back of your mind—you are teaching yourself that those worrisome thoughts do not deserve your full attention.

Did you feel anxiety during the procedure? You may experience an initial increase in anxiety as you follow the relaxation exercises, for a number of reasons. Unusual sensations, such as a floating sensation or a sinking feeling, sometimes occur as a result of deep relaxation, and these sensations may produce anxiety, although they are normal and harmless. Sometimes the sense of “letting go” is disturbing initially. Again, this may take some getting used to, especially if you usually tend to be on edge, vigilant, and ready for any possibility. “Letting go” will feel unfamiliar at first, and perhaps a little threatening. However, with practice, you will learn that negative events are not more likely to occur, just because you allow yourself to relax. Another reason that relaxation will sometimes increase anxiety is that you may be worrying about things that you should be doing while you're attempting to relax. In this case, practice dismissing these thoughts and shifting your attention back to the sensations of tensing and relaxing your muscles. If you did become anxious as a result of the relaxation technique, you should continue practicing the exercise regardless. With repetition, your anxiety will decrease and you will feel the true effects of relaxation.

Keep a record of your relaxation practice on the Relaxation Record so that you can evaluate your progress. Use a new Relaxation Record for each week

over the next several weeks. On the record, note the level of relaxation that you achieve by the end of the exercise (on a 0- to 100-point scale, where 0 = no relaxation and 100 = excellent relaxation). Also, rate your average degree of concentration during the procedure (using a 0- to 100-point scale, where 0 = no concentration and 100 = excellent concentration). Remember, concentration refers to focusing on the sensations of tension and relaxation. The Relaxation Record lists two practices for each day. Obviously, the goal is for the ratings of relaxation and concentration to increase with practice. If they do not increase, consider the possibilities listed earlier; perhaps you're trying too hard to relax, maybe you're becoming frustrated because you are thinking about too many other things that "should" get done, or perhaps you are uncomfortable with the idea of "letting go."

After you have practiced the relaxation procedure for seven days and are able to achieve at least moderate relaxation (at least 50 on the 0- to 100-point scale), move to the eight-muscle-group procedure (described later) for one of your two daily practices. That is, for one of your daily practices, continue to use the 16-muscle-group procedure, and use the eight-muscle-group procedure for the other one. On the other hand, if you are experiencing difficulty relaxing, or if you have not practiced enough, continue to use the 16-muscle-group procedure for both daily practices for another seven days.

The end goal is to achieve one-step relaxation. The first move toward that goal is the eight-muscle-group exercise, which is the same as the 16-muscle-group procedure, except that certain muscles are excluded. We suggest the following muscle groups for the eight-muscle-group procedure: (1) arms, combining lower and upper arms; (2) legs, combining lower and upper legs; (3) stomach; (4) chest; (5) shoulders; (6) neck; (7) eyes; and (8) forehead (either upper or lower). However, if another area of your body typically becomes very tense, then replace one of the recommended muscle groups with that one. Use the same tensing and relaxing procedures, focusing your attention on the sensations, and progressing from one muscle group to another. During each relaxation phase, repeat the word "relax" as you exhale. Eventually, that word will become a strong cue, or trigger, for relaxation. Count from 1 to 5 to become more relaxed, relax, and breathe slowly for a couple of minutes. Then count backward from 5 to 1 as you gradually return to an alert state. As before, practice the eight-muscle-group relaxation procedure, daily, and keep a record of your practices on the Relaxation Record. Monitoring will provide feedback for yourself and anyone you're working with. An outline of the relaxation procedures is shown.

---

## Relaxation Record

---

Rate relaxation and concentration at the end of each practice, using the following scale:

0-----10-----20-----30-----40-----50-----60-----70-----80-----90-----100  
None            Mild            Moderate            Strong            Excellent

Date	Practice	Relaxation at the End of the Exercise	Concentration During the Exercise
	1		
	2		
	1		
	2		
	1		
	2		
	1		
	2		
	1		
	2		
	1		
	2		

### Outline for Progressive Muscle Relaxation

1. Choose a quiet location, with a comfortable chair or bed.
2. Loosen tight clothing, and remove glasses or contact lenses.
3. Tense for 10 seconds and relax for 20 seconds, repeating the word “relax” silently to yourself on each exhalation, for the following major muscle groups:
  - 1, 2 Lower arms
  - 3, 4 Upper arms
  - 5, 6 Lower legs
  - 7, 8 Upper legs
  - 9 Abdomen
  - 10 Chest
  - 11 Shoulders
  - 12 Neck
  - 13 Mouth, throat, and jaw
  - 14 Eyes
  - 15 Lower forehead
  - 16 Upper forehead
4. Focus your attention on the sensations of tension and relaxation.
5. After tensing and releasing the 16 muscle groups, count from 1 to 5 to deepen relaxation, and breathe slowly for 2 minutes, repeating the word “relax” with every exhalation. Then count from 5 to 1 to return to a state of alertness.
6. Practice twice a day, for seven days.
7. Monitor your practice using the Relaxation Record.
8. Proceed to the eight-muscle-group procedure when you can achieve at least moderate relaxation with the 16-muscle-group procedure. Use the same exercises with the following muscle groups:
  - 1 Upper and lower arms
  - 2 Upper and lower legs

- 3 Abdomen
  - 4 Chest
  - 5 Shoulders
  - 6 Neck
  - 7 Eyes
  - 8 Forehead
9. Practice the eight- and 16-muscle-group procedures once daily each, for seven days.

## Special Issues

---

The relaxation exercise may be difficult at first. We have already mentioned some of the difficulties that can arise with relaxation, and we summarize them and other common difficulties in this section:

1. *Frustration and rushing.* Sometimes, frustration develops as a result of not feeling the immediate effects of relaxation or from trying to “squeeze” in a relaxation practice in between many other tasks. To manage this frustration, remember that it would be rare for anyone to feel the effects of relaxation immediately; practice effects build slowly. Also, trying to fit relaxation in between other tasks that you believe must get done only intensifies the tension, and will almost guarantee that the procedure will not be relaxing. Set aside a specific time to relax, and be sure to give yourself plenty of time. Remember, some of the things that you feel should get done immediately probably can wait.
2. *Concentration.* Sometimes keeping one’s mind on the task, particularly for the full 30 minutes, is difficult. However, it is important to let go of other thoughts, images, or worries that enter your mind. Simply tell yourself to concentrate on what you’re feeling, as if you were giving a running commentary on your physical experiences.
3. *Increased anxiety.* As mentioned earlier, you may experience anxiety while attempting to relax. Sometimes this is due to feeling out of control, or letting down one’s guard, and sometimes it is related to feeling new, and perhaps troublesome, sensations (such as a sensation





of floating). Remember that these sensations, which may seem odd to you, are completely normal. Also, remember that it is okay to let down your guard. You are not at risk for more negative events just by being more relaxed.

4. *Falling asleep.* Sometimes people fall asleep when they practice relaxing. This does not help you to learn an applied skill, and so it should be avoided as much as possible. Practice the relaxation exercises at times when you are not tired.

## Homework

---



-  Continue to monitor your levels of anxiety, using the Worry Event Record and the Daily Mood Record.
-  Continue to observe your episodes of anxiety in terms of the behavioral, physical, and thinking response components, and the ways in which they interact.
-  Practice the 16-muscle-group relaxation procedure twice daily for the next seven days, recording your practices using the Relaxation Record.
-  After seven days, evaluate your progress. If your relaxation ratings are mostly less than 50, then continue the same 16-muscle-group procedure for another seven days. If your relaxation ratings are mostly 50 or higher, then start practicing the eight-muscle-group procedure for one of your daily practices, for seven days, using the 16-muscle-group procedure for the other daily practice

## Self-Assessment

---

Answer each of the following questions by circling T (true) or F (false). Answers are given in the appendix.

1. The goal of relaxation training is to reduce the levels of physical tension. T    F
  2. Practice should be done whenever time is available. T    F
-

- |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| 3. Relaxation procedures have two components: physical relaxation and mental relaxation.  | T | F |
| 4. As much as possible, one should concentrate on the feelings of tension and relaxation as one progresses from one muscle group to the next. | T | F |
| 5. If I do not feel relaxed immediately, then I must be doing something wrong.  | T | F |