

## **JACOBSON PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION: A MODIFIED APPROACH** (From Mental Toughness Training for Sports, Loehr, 1986)

Jacobson's training procedures involve the alternation of tensing muscles and relaxing muscles, with the specific intention of developing an acute awareness of the difference. The technique, you will find, is simple.

The following procedures take approximately ten minutes. Follow the steps below in the given order.

1. Select a comfortable chair, preferably a reclining one.
2. Find a quiet room.
3. Close both eyes, take two deep breaths, and feel yourself "let go".
4. Extend both arms straight out and clench your fists... gradually increase the tension level until all the muscles in your fingers and hands are fully tight... then relax... let your arms drop naturally. Be aware of the difference between feeling "tense" and "relaxed".
5. Extend both arms again, straight out, and tense the muscles of your lower arm and elbow... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax... let your arms drop naturally to your side.
6. Tense the muscles in your forehead by frowning... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax... let all the muscles in your forehead become smoother and smoother.
7. Tense the muscles in your face... grimace... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax.
8. Tense the muscles in your neck... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax.
9. Tense the muscles of the shoulders... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax.
10. Tense the muscles of the back, first the upper back and then the lower... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax.
11. Tense the muscles of your chest... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax.
12. Tense the muscles of your stomach... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax.
13. Tense the muscles of your abdomen... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax.
14. Tense the muscles of your upper leg - all the muscles of the thigh... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax.
15. Tense the muscles of your lower leg - all the muscles of the knee and calf... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax.
16. Tense the muscles of your feet and toes... hold it, become aware of the feeling... now relax.
17. Now concentrate on relaxing all the muscles of your body. Become aware of any areas that might still be tense in any way, and relax them. Maintain this state of total muscle relaxation for at least two to three minutes.
18. Open your eyes, stretch, and feel refreshed... go about your business.

This systematic process of muscle relaxation, although quite simple, has proved to be a powerful and useful technique in helping athletes develop an acute awareness of muscle tension states and learn to control the effects of tension on the muscles themselves. This routine must be practiced regularly for mastery of the skills.

**Progressive Relaxation: Training Strategies**  
(From Mental Toughness Training for Sports, Loehr, 1986)

1. Experiment with different muscle tension levels as you practice your sport. Try to discover the best zone of tension for your best performance. Practice executing critical movements in your sport with the different levels of tightness and looseness in your hands, arms, legs, etc. Determine for yourself how relaxed you must be to achieve maximum power, quickness, and accuracy with the least effort.
2. Determine the performance consequences of not enough muscle tension as well as excessive muscle tension as you practice your sport.
3. Monitor the amount of muscle tension that exists in your muscles when you are performing such common activities as driving, writing, eating, or walking. Practice matching the effort to the task. Your objective is to use just enough tension to get the job done perfectly.
4. Practice Jacobson's exercises ten to fifteen minutes each day for seven days.
5. During the second week of practice with the Jacobson method, try to get your muscles to relax quickly without bringing muscle groups to a full state of contraction. If you are not successful, return to the original exercises. Repeat until you can relax all your muscles very quickly just by thinking certain thoughts.
6. Constantly practice raising your positive intensity to the highest possible level while simultaneously keeping your muscles relaxed and free.

**Remember** - your competitive goal is relaxation of *muscles*, not of your *mind*! High-level performance requires that your muscles be relaxed by your mind remain crystal clear and alert.