

Script for

Squeeze Out Stress – Mindful Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Modified from <https://mindfulnessercises.com/squeeze-out-stress/>

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This is one of the easiest practices for reducing stress. If you haven't done this already, there are a couple of guidelines. First, don't wait for stress symptoms to reach a high level before using this technique. Start early! Secondly, practice often as a way of helping your body learn to relax – even if you don't think you need it. Since this is a progressive muscle relaxation and mindfulness exercise, if you are already experiencing pain in a part of the body, such as a headache, then don't tighten up that area when we get to that area as it may increase the pain or discomfort. Just skip over it.

Instructions:

Find a quiet spot where you can sit or recline for up to twenty minutes. Sometimes it's helpful to find a place where there is low light or no light—especially if one of your stress symptoms is sensitivity to light.

- To begin, spend a few seconds pressing your heels into the floor or press your hands together if you are lying down. This is just to help you get grounded
- Take three or four nice, satisfying, deep breaths. Exhale slowly. If you have learned how to do belly breathing, or diaphragmatic breathing, that is the kind of breathing that you will use here.
- Starting at the top of your body and moving downward, imagine squeezing all the tension into a ball with your feet as you inhale. Tense both feet (not to the point of pain) but just enough that you feel the tightness and tension. Hold this pose—also holding your in-breath—for a good five seconds, then release the ball of tension in your feet and exhale sloooowwwlyyy for as long as you can. For example, imagine that you are squeezing all the tension in your feet into a ball as you inhale... one... two... three... four... five... Then release the ball of tension in your feet as you exhale slowly for as long as you can. Imagine that you have just squeezed out the stress and tension as your feet relax. Notice how nice it feels to let go of tightness in your feet. Now, inhale, imagining your breath traveling all the way down the body and settling into your feet. As you exhale, feel this part of the body relax even further.
- If you want, take a couple longer inhalations into your feet. With each slow exhalation you can feel your feet relax more and more deeply as any remaining tension or tightness is drained and squeezed out of your body. At this time, you can even smile inwardly at your feet, a part of your body that works hard carrying you around throughout the day.
- Remember that God cares about your feet! 1 & 2 Samuel remind us that “God keeps the feet of his godly ones... He makes my feet like hinds’ feet, and sets me on high places.” Our feet matter to God.

- Next, you will move your attention up to the ankles, shins, and calves of both legs. Imagine that you are squeezing all the tension in your ankles, shins and calves into a ball as you inhale... Hold this pose one... two... three... four... five... Then release the ball of tension in your ankles, shins and calves as you exhale slowly for as long as you can. Imagine that you have just squeezed out the stress and tension as your ankles, shins and calves relax in both legs. Notice how nice it feels to let go of the tightness in this area. Now inhale. Imagining your breath traveling all the way down your body and settling into your calves, shins and ankles. As you exhale, feel this part of your body relax even further. If you would like, take a couple longer inhalations into your ankles, shins and calves. With each slow exhalation you can feel the ankles, shins and calves relax even more deeply as any other remaining tightness and tension is drained and squeezed out of your body. At this time, try smiling inwardly at these parts of the body in gratitude, acknowledging how hard your ankles, shins and calves work carrying you around throughout the day.
- God cares about your body – Psalm 18: 36 reminds us that “God widens a place beneath me for my steps, and my ankles do not give way.”
- Little by little you will move up the entire body—tensing and squeezing each part into a ball to push out the stress as you also use your breath to do this. Move from the feet up to the knees, the thighs and hips, the stomach and abdominal area, the back muscles, the hands, the arms (forearm, elbow, upper arms), the neck and shoulders, and finally, the face, skull and scalp.
- Remember that it is God who made your body. Psalm 139 tells us ...”For you formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your work; my soul knows it very well.”
- Now we are going to focus on your knees and thighs and hips of both legs. Imagine that you are squeezing all the tension in your knees and thighs and hips into a ball as you inhale... Hold this pose one... two... three... four... five... Then release the ball of tension in your knees and thighs and hips as you exhale slowly for as long as you can. Imagine that you have just squeezed out the stress and tension as your knees and thighs and hips relax in both legs. Notice how nice it feels to let go of the tightness in this area. Now inhale. Imagining your breath traveling down your body and settling into your knees and thighs and hips. As you exhale, feel this part of your body relax even further. If you would like, take a couple longer inhalations into your knees and thighs and hips. With each slow exhalation you can feel the knees and thighs and hips relax even more deeply as any other remaining tightness and tension is drained and squeezed out of your body. At this time, try smiling inwardly at these parts of the body in gratitude, acknowledging how hard your knees and thighs and hips work carrying you around throughout the day.
- Recall to mind that God cares about you and your body. Isaiah 40:31 reminds us, “but those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.”
- Now we are going to focus on your stomach and abdominal area. Imagine that you are squeezing all the tension in your stomach and abdominal area into a ball as you inhale... Hold this pose one... two... three... four... five... Then release the ball of tension in your stomach and abdominal area as you exhale slowly for as long as you can. Imagine that you have just squeezed out the stress and tension as your stomach and abdominal area relax. Notice how nice it feels to let go of tightness in this area. Now inhale. Imagining your breath traveling down your body and settling into your stomach and abdominal area. As you exhale, feel this part of your body relax

even further. If you would like, take a couple longer inhalations into your stomach and abdominal area. With each slow exhalation you can feel the stomach and abdominal area relax even more deeply as any other remaining tightness and tension is drained and squeezed out of your body. At this time, try smiling inwardly at your stomach and abdominal area in gratitude, acknowledging how hard your stomach and abdominal area work on your body's behalf throughout the day. You know that God cares for you when you're anxious and stressed. 1 Peter 5:7 reminds us to "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you."

- Next, let's focus on your back muscles. Imagine that you are squeezing all the tension in your back muscles into a ball as you inhale... Hold this pose one... two... three... four... five... Then release the ball of tension in your back muscles as you exhale slowly for as long as you can. Imagine that you have just squeezed out the stress and tension as your back muscles relax. Notice how nice it feels to let go of the tightness in this area. Now inhale. Imagining your breath traveling down your body and settling into your back muscles. As you exhale, feel this part of your body relax even further. If you would like, take a couple longer inhalations into your back muscles. With each slow exhalation you can feel the back muscles relax even more deeply as any other remaining tightness and tension is drained and squeezed out of your body. At this time, try smiling inwardly at your back muscles in gratitude, acknowledging how hard your back muscles work on your body's behalf throughout the day.
- Now we are going to focus on your hands. If you can, make a fist, and imagine that you are squeezing all the tension in your hands into a ball as you inhale... Hold this pose one... two... three... four... five... Then release the ball of tension in your hands as you exhale slowly for as long as you can. Imagine that you have just squeezed out the stress and tension as hands relax. Notice how nice it feels to let go of the tightness in your hands. Now inhale. Imagining your breath traveling down your body and settling into your hands. As you exhale, feel your hands relax even further. If you would like, take a couple longer inhalations into hands. With each slow exhalation you can feel your hands relax even more deeply as any other remaining tightness and tension is drained and squeezed out of your body. At this time, try smiling inwardly at your hands in gratitude, acknowledging how hard your hands work on your body's behalf throughout the day.
- Recall Psalm 121: 1-8 " I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth. He will not let your foot be moved; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper; the Lord is your shade on your right hand.
- Next, let's focus on your arms (including your forearms, elbows, and upper arms). Imagine that you are squeezing all the tension in your arms into a ball as you inhale... Hold this pose one... two... three... four... five... Then release the ball of tension in your arms as you exhale slowly for as long as you can. Imagine that you have just squeezed out the stress and tension as your arms relax. Notice how nice it feels to let go of the tightness in your arms. Now inhale. Imagining your breath traveling down your body and settling into your arms. As you exhale, feel this part of your body relax even further. If you would like, take a couple longer inhalations into your arms. With each slow exhalation you can feel the arms relax even more deeply as any other remaining tightness and tension is drained and squeezed out of your body. At this time, try smiling inwardly at your arms in gratitude, acknowledging how hard your arms work on your body's behalf throughout the day.

- Isaiah 46:4 reminds us that even when our arms are stressed or weak, God’s arms will carry us, “Even to your old age I will be the same, and even to your graying years I will bear you! I have done it, and I will carry you; and I will bear you and I will deliver you.”
- Now we are going to focus on your neck and shoulders. Imagine that you are squeezing all the tension in your neck and shoulders into a ball as you inhale... Hold this pose one... two... three... four... five... Then release the ball of tension in your neck and shoulders as you exhale slowly for as long as you can. Imagine that you have just squeezed out the stress and tension as your neck and shoulders relax. Notice how nice it feels to let go of the tightness in your neck and shoulders. Now inhale. Imagining your breath traveling slightly down your body and settling into your neck and shoulders. As you exhale, feel your neck and shoulders relax even further. If you would like, take a couple longer inhalations into neck and shoulders. With each slow exhalation you can feel your neck and shoulders relax even more deeply as any other remaining tightness and tension is drained and squeezed out of your body. At this time, try smiling inwardly at your neck and shoulders in gratitude, acknowledging how hard your neck and shoulders work on your body’s behalf throughout the day.
- Remember the Word of the Lord, “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” – Matthew 11:28-30
- Finally, we are now going to focus on your face, skull and scalp. Imagine that you are squeezing all the tension in your face, skull and scalp into a ball as you inhale... Hold this pose one... two... three... four... five... Then release the ball of tension in your face, skull and scalp as you exhale slowly for as long as you can. Imagine that you have just squeezed out the stress and tension as your face, skull and scalp. Notice how nice it feels to let go of the tightness in your face, skull and scalp. Now inhale. Imagining your breath traveling into your body and settling into your face, skull and scalp. As you exhale, feel your face, skull and scalp relax even further. If you would like, take a couple longer inhalations into your face, skull and scalp. With each slow exhalation you can feel your face, skull and scalp relax even more deeply as any other remaining tightness and tension is drained and squeezed out of your body. At this time, try smiling inwardly at your face, skull and scalp in gratitude, acknowledging how hard your face, skull and scalp work on your body’s behalf throughout the day.
- Luke 12 reminds us in verse 6-7 that “Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don’t be afraid; you are worth more than a whole flock of sparrows.”

Now take a couple longer inhalations and allow your breath to fill each part of your body. With each slow exhalation you can feel your entire body relax more and more deeply as all the tightness and tension drains away and is squeezed out of your body. At this time, try smiling inwardly at your entire body in gratitude, acknowledging how hard your whole body works throughout the day.

When you are finished, let yourself revel in the deep peace and calm that pervades your body. Spend as long as you want to rest in this way. You may want to send your inner smile to the entire body at this time. Don’t forget to send gratitude to yourself for taking care of your body and managing your stress.

One last meditation for our time together, from Lamentations 3:22-23, “Yet this I call to mind

and therefore I have hope: 22 Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed,
for his compassions never fail. 23 They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.
Amen.