

Since breathing is something we can control and regulate, it is a useful tool for achieving a relaxed and clear state of mind.



The 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise

This exercise is utterly simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Although you can do the exercise in any position, sit with your back straight while learning the exercise. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Note that you always inhale quietly through your nose and exhale audibly through your mouth. The tip of your tongue stays in position the whole time. Exhalation takes twice as long as inhalation. The absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. If you have trouble holding your breath, speed the exercise up but keep to the ratio of 4:7:8 for the three phases. With practice you can slow it all down and get used to inhaling and exhaling more and more deeply.

This exercise is a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system. Unlike tranquilizing drugs, which are often effective when you first take them but then lose their power over time, this exercise is subtle when you first try it but gains in power with repetition and practice. Do it at least twice a day. You cannot do it too frequently. Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice. Later, if you wish, you can extend it to eight breaths. If you feel a little lightheaded when you first breathe this way, do not be concerned; it will pass.

Once you develop this technique by practicing it every day, it will be a very useful tool that you will always have with you. Use it whenever anything upsetting happens - before you react. Use it whenever you are aware of internal tension. Use it to help you fall asleep. This exercise cannot be recommended too highly. Everyone can benefit from it.

Use diaphragmic deep breathing and close your eyes, focusing on breathing in peace and breathing out stress.



Here's How:

1. Sit in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes, but keep your back straight, shoulders relaxed, head up, your eyes (behind your lids) focused ahead.
3. Take a deep, cleansing breath, expanding your belly and keeping your shoulders relaxed, and hold it in for the count of six. Exhale, and repeat twice more. Then breathe normally, and focus your attention on your breathing. As you breathe, inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth, still expanding your belly rather than moving your shoulders up and down.
4. If your thoughts drift toward the stresses of the day ahead or of the day behind you, gently refocus on your breathing and remain in the present moment. Feel the air move in, and feel the air move out. That's it.
5. Continue this for as little or as long as you like, and you should notice that your body is more relaxed and your mind is more centered. Enjoy the rest of your day!

Tips:

1. As you breathe, let your abdomen expand and contract, rather than moving your shoulders up and down. This deeper breathing is more natural and similar to how babies breathe. It gives you increased lung capacity, whereas the 'shallow breathing' adults usually utilize doesn't allow as much oxygenation of the blood.
2. Don't breathe too quickly or too slowly; just breathe at a natural rate, but more deeply.
3. If you find your thoughts drifting a lot at first, don't worry that you're doing it 'wrong'. Noticing that you've drifted and refocusing to your breathing is part of the practice, and something you're doing 'right'!

What You Need:

*A quiet place

*A few minutes

*A willing mind

Autonomic Nervous System Responses

Sympathetic (Excited)	Parasympathetic (Relaxation)
Increased heart rate	Decreased heart rate
Increased blood pressure	Decreased blood pressure
Increased body metabolism	Decreased body metabolism
Increased breathing rate	Decreased breathing rate
Increased blood flow to muscles and brain	Decreased blood flow to muscles
Pupils dilate	Pupils become smaller
Increase blood clotting	Decrease blood clotting
Stimulated by caffeine (coffee, tea, colas)	Stimulated by exercise, sleep, relaxation
Stimulated by nicotine (cigarettes, cigars)	Stimulated by moderate use of alcohol

Stress / Unstress – Keith W. Sehnert, MD