

4–7–8 Breathing Technique

This breathing technique developed by Dr. Andrew Weil is a powerful way to elicit the relaxation response that gets more effective over time. It is a tonic for the nervous system, shifting energy from the sympathetic to the parasympathetic system, with many physiological benefits, including lowered blood pressure and heart rate, increased circulation to the extremities and skin, and improved digestion. It can also help you let go of emotional upset and cravings.

Instructions

1. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge behind and above your front teeth and keep it there through the whole exercise.
2. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a *whoosh* sound.
3. Close your mouth and inhale deeply and quietly through the nose to a (silent) count of 4.
4. Hold your breath for a count of 7.
5. Exhale audibly through your mouth to a count of 8.
6. Repeat steps 3, 4, and 5 for a total of four breaths.

This breathing practice can be done in any position; if seated, keep your back straight. 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.

Practice the exercise at least twice a day and, in addition, whenever you feel stressed, anxious, or off center.

Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice but repeat the exercise as often as you wish. After a month, if you are comfortable with it, increase to eight breaths each time.