

# 4 - 7 - 8 Breath

## Relaxation Exercise

A patient handout from Dr. Andrew Weil. This is a very simple and useful tool to achieve general relaxation and to manage stress.

### Beginner Tips:

*Ideally, sit with your back straight.*

*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.*

*Exhale through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward*

### Anyone can do it...

- Simple
- Quick
- No equipment needed
- Do it anywhere

### STEPS

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a *whoosh* sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of **4**.
- Hold your breath for a count of **7**.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of **8**.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

### Are the numbers important?

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.

### Why should I do it?

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. Use this new skill whenever anything upsetting happens - before you react. Use it whenever you are aware of internal tension. Use it to help you fall asleep.

### How often?

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.

## Three-Part Breath

This breathing exercise is often done while seated in a comfortable, cross-legged position, but it is also nice to do while lying on the back, particularly at the beginning of your practice. When you are lying down, you can really feel the breath moving through your body as it makes contact with the floor.

1. Come to sitting or lying down on the back with the eyes closed, relaxing the face and the body.
2. Begin by observing the natural inhalation and exhalation of your breath without changing anything. If you find yourself distracted by the activity in your mind, try not to engage in the thoughts. Just notice them and then let them go, bringing your attention back to the inhales and the exhales.
3. Then begin to inhale deeply through the nose.
4. On each inhale, fill the belly up with your breath. Expand the belly with air like a balloon.
5. On each exhale, expel all the air out from the belly through your nose. Draw the navel back towards your spine to make sure that the belly is empty of air.
6. Repeat this deep belly breathing for about five breaths.
7. On the next inhale, fill the belly up with air as described above. Then when the belly is full, draw in a little more breath and let that air expand into the rib cage causing the ribs to widen apart.
8. On the exhale, let the air go first from the rib cage, letting the ribs slide closer together, and then from the belly, drawing the navel back towards the spine.
9. Repeat this deep breathing into the belly and rib cage for about five breaths.
10. On the next inhale, fill the belly and rib cage up with air as described above. Then draw in just a little more air and let it fill the upper chest, all the way up to the collarbone, causing the area around the heart (which is called the heart center in yoga), expand and rise.
11. On the exhale, let the breath go first from the upper chest, allowing the heart center sink back down, then from the rib cage, letting the ribs slide closer together. Finally, let the air go from the belly, drawing the navel back towards the spine.
12. You are practicing three-part breath! Continue at your own pace, eventually coming to let the three parts of the breath happen smoothly without pausing.
13. Continue for about 10 breaths.