

The Art and Science of Breathing

This information can also be found at <http://www.drweil.com/drw/u/id/ART02039#reducestress>

[Breathing To Reduce Stress](#)

[Breathing - A Mental Energizer](#)

[Breathing 101](#)

[Enlightenment Through Breath](#)

Breathing To Reduce Stress

Breathing exercises are a wonderful way to reduce anxiety, agitation and stress, while promoting relaxation, calm and inner peace. It may take some practice - and requires some commitment on your part to achieve results. However, the long-term benefits are well worth the effort - a calm and relaxed body and mind are less prone to health issues.

Breathing strongly influences physiology and thought processes, including moods. By simply focusing your attention on your breathing, and without doing anything to change it, you can move in the direction of relaxation. Too much attention on upsetting thoughts may cause anxiety, guilt and unhappiness. Get in the habit of shifting your awareness to your breath whenever you find yourself dwelling on stressful situations. One breathing exercise I highly recommend is the **4-7-8 breath**. It 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.

1. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
2. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
3. Hold your breath for a count of seven.
4. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
5. 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; but the ratio of 4:7:8 is. 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. Practice 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.

Breathing - A Mental Energizer

If you need a pick-me-up or are feeling a bit anxious, try the following breathing exercise; it can help to bring energy and clarity to your mind. The first time, do it for just 15 seconds, increasing the duration by five seconds every time until you can complete one full minute. Always breathe normally between exercises.

- Sit upright with your back straight, eyes closed, and shoulders relaxed.
- Place the tip of your tongue against the bony ridge behind and above your upper teeth.
- Breathe rapidly through your nose, in and out, with your mouth slightly closed.
- Keep your inhale and exhale short and equal. Your chest should be almost mechanical in its movements - rapid, like air is pumping through it.
- Try to inhale and exhale three times per second, if you can, keeping your breath audible.

Ideally, you will feel the muscular effects of this breathing exercise at the base of your neck (just above the collarbone) and at the diaphragm. Put your hands on these areas to get a sense of the movements.

Breathing 101

Breathing exercises are a wonderfully effective way to reduce stress, regulate mood, and feel energized. One way to promote deeper breathing and better health is by exhaling completely. Try it: take a deep breath, let it out effortlessly, and then squeeze out a little more. Doing this regularly will help build up the muscles between your ribs, and your exhalations will naturally become deeper and longer. Start by practicing this exhalation exercise consciously, and eventually it will become a healthy, unconscious habit.

Enlightenment Through Breath

In Buddhist and yogic traditions, people claim to have reached an enlightened state by doing nothing more than paying attention to the rising and falling of their breath. What easier way could there be to reach such a state? Especially since breathing - following the ebb and flow of your breath - is an intrinsic part of meditation. By paying attention to your breath, you will rapidly change your state of consciousness, begin to relax, and slowly detach from ordinary awareness. Try to focus on the point between your in breath and out breath that is dimensionless, and glimpse the elements of enlightenment in that space.

Learn which [breathing exercises](#) Dr. Weil recommends.