

The 4-7-8 breathing technique is based on [pranayama](#) breathing exercises. Pranayama is the ancient yogic practice of controlling your breath. These types of [mindful breathing](#) exercises have been shown to have many benefits for stress reduction and relaxation. The 4-7-8 breathing technique was developed by Dr. Andrew Weil. He refers to it as a "natural tranquilizer for the nervous system".

How to Practice 4-7-8 Breathing

You can practice 4-7-8 breathing anywhere and at any time. When you're first learning, try to practice at least twice a day, but you can do it as often as you want. Only do it for four cycles in a row in the beginning. After you get used to it, you can work up to eight cycles. You may feel lightheaded at first, but this will pass.

1. Find a comfortable place to sit with your back straight.
2. Place your tongue against the back of your top teeth and keep it there.
3. Exhale completely through your mouth around your tongue, making a whoosh sound. Purse your lips if it helps.
4. Close your lips and inhale through your nose for a count of four.
5. Hold your breath for a count of seven.
6. Exhale completely through your mouth making a whoosh sound for a count of eight.
7. This completes one cycle. Repeat for three more cycles.

Do 4-7-8 breathing anytime you feel stressed. It will become more powerful as you use it. Practice doing it before you respond to an upsetting situation and whenever you're having trouble getting to sleep.

Benefits of Deep, Slow Breathing

Mindful breathing practices such as 4-7-8 breathing can produce what Harvard cardiologist Dr. Herbert Benson called the relaxation response. You have a natural [stress response](#) that's designed to help you deal with dangerous situations. This fight-or-flight response can help you survive but can take a toll on your health when it's overused for [everyday stresses](#).

ADVERTISEMENT

This stress response suppresses your [immune system](#) and can cause other health problems, including [high blood pressure](#), [depression](#), and [anxiety](#). The relaxation response interrupts this stress response with a profound sense of rest. Other benefits may include:

SUGGESTED

-
-

Reduced anxiety. A study of college students showed that practicing pranayama reduced test anxiety in students. Another study of senior citizens showed decreased anxiety after two months of deep breathing exercises.

Lower blood pressure. Slow deep breathing for five minutes has been shown to reduce blood pressure and [heart rate](#) in people who practice it.

Improved sleep. One of the negative side effects of stress can be trouble [sleeping](#). It can be almost impossible to fall asleep when your body is caught up in the stress response. Practicing deep, slow breathing techniques such as 4-7-8 breathing can trigger your body's relaxation response and help you get to sleep.

Less pain. A study of 16 healthy people found that those who practiced relaxed deep breathing experienced less [pain](#) than those who practiced deep breathing that required a lot of sustained attention. Both groups experienced less tension, anger, and depression.

Improved concentration. A 2017 study examined the effect of eight weeks of deep, slow, abdominal breathing on [attention](#), emotions, and stress levels. After training, the people in the deep breathing group performed better on tests of attention and had fewer negative emotions.

How Deep, Slow Breathing Affects Your Body

The sort of deep breathing practiced as part of the 4-7-8 breathing technique helps calm your body by activating your parasympathetic nervous system. Your body's automatic functions, such as your heartbeat and digestion, are controlled by your automatic [nervous system](#). This system has two parts, the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system.

The sympathetic nervous system controls your body's stress response. The parasympathetic nervous system controls your body's rest and relaxation response. When

you activate one of these, you suppress the other. This is why deep breathing is so effective at causing the relaxation response.

The 4-7-8 breathing technique is one method of deep breathing that you can use to reap all of these benefits. However, the particular method you use doesn't matter. If the 4-7-8 method doesn't work well for you, you can try another. You should experience the [relaxation response](#) with any breathing method that is slow and deep.