4-7-8 Breathing

Body-Based Skills: Calming Down With a Long Breath Out

4-7-8 breathing is a breathing pattern where you breathe in for 4 counts, hold for 7, and breathe out for 8. Dr. Andrew Weil made it popular, building on breathing practices from yoga. One round of four breaths takes about a minute, and many people use it to calm down or to help them fall asleep.

1 The pattern

Sit up straight or lie down. Rest the tip of your tongue on the ridge just behind your upper front teeth, and keep it there the whole time. To begin, breathe all the way out through your mouth with a soft whoosh.

Breathe in Count to 4	Close your mouth and breathe in quietly through your nose while you count to 4. Keep the count slow and steady.
Hold Count to 7	Hold your breath gently while you count to 7. There is no need to strain or tense up.
Breathe out Count to 8	Breathe out fully through your mouth, making a soft whoosh sound, while you count to 8.

That is one breath. Repeat the pattern three more times, for four breaths in all.

Why does this work? *Your breath out lasts twice as long as your breath in. A long, slow breath out slows your heart rate and turns on the body's rest and digest system. Counting also gives your mind one simple job. There is only a little research on this exact pattern, but slow breathing with a long breath out has been studied widely and is linked with feeling calmer.*

2 Tips

- The rhythm matters more than the speed. If holding for 7 feels too long, count a little faster.
- Do no more than four breaths at a time for the first month. Later you can build up to eight.
- Practice twice a day when you are calm, so the skill is ready when you need it.
- Feeling a little light-headed the first few times is common. If you feel dizzy, stop and breathe normally.
- If you are pregnant or have a heart or lung condition, ask your doctor before holding your breath.

**This worksheet provides information but is not a substitute for therapy. It works best with guidance from a professional.*

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3 Practice log

Rate how stressed you feel from 0 (calm) to 10 (the most stressed you can imagine), before and after each practice.

Date	Time of day	Before	Breaths	After	What I noticed
Wed 5 Nov	*Bedtime*	*6*	*4*	*3*	*My shoulders let go on the third breath*

4 When I will use it

Moments when 4-7-8 breathing could help me:

Example: Lying awake at night going over my to-do list

What I will do next if I still feel on edge after four breaths:

If anxiety, panic attacks, or trouble sleeping are getting in the way of your life, talk to a therapist or doctor. They can help you build a plan that includes skills like this one.

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