

Mindful Breathing

Introduction

Learning to recognize our breathing is one of the first steps in managing our reactions to certain emotions. When we are anxious our breathing rate increases and affects our ability to remain calm and regulate stress. Focusing on our breath allows us to ground ourselves in what is happening, in the moment.

After trying one of the following breathing exercises, complete the questionnaire.

Remember: Breathing exercises are things you can do when you begin to feel stressed or upset to help manage those emotions or thoughts.

Dr. Weil's 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise

This breathing exercise 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; 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.

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.

Once you develop this technique by practicing it every day, it will be a very useful tool that you will always have with you. Use it whenever anything upsetting happens - before you react. Use it whenever you are aware of internal tension. Use it to help you fall asleep. This exercise cannot be recommended too highly. Everyone can benefit from it.

Mindful Breathing

Find a quiet place to sit comfortably with your eyes closed. Make sure to try breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth. Slow your breathing by counting slowly while you inhale and exhale, making them smooth and relaxed. Try holding your breath in for 1 or 2 seconds, then exhale slowly through your mouth.

Try Mindful Breathing for at least 5 minutes twice a day. You can start with this type of breathing when you aren't feeling anxious or stressed. With practice, you will be able to use this technique in situations that cause anxiety or stress!

Describe a situation where you could use breathing exercise to relax or manage a tough emotion or thought.

How do you plan on reminding yourself to breathe in stressful situations? Come up with a way and write it down here. Make sure to use your support system, a phone reminder, calendar, or alarm to help!