BREATH EXERCISES FOR CALMING THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

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https://www.drweil.com/health-wellness/body-mind-spirit/stress-anxiety/breathing-three-exercises/

Since breathing is something we can control and regulate, it is a useful tool for achieving a relaxed and clear state of mind. I recommend three breathing exercises and techniques to help relax and reduce stress: **The Stimulating Breath**, **The 4-7-8 Breathing Exercise** (also called the Relaxing Breath), and **Breath Counting**. Try each of these breathing exercises and techniques and see how they affect your stress and anxiety levels.

Breathing Exercise 1:

The Stimulating Breath (also called the Bellows Breath)

The Stimulating Breath is a yogic breathing techniques. Its aim is to raise vital energy and increase alertness.

- Inhale and exhale rapidly through your nose, keeping your mouth closed but relaxed. Your breaths in and out should be equal in duration, but as short as possible. This is a noisy breathing exercise.
- Try for three in-and-out breath cycles per second. This produces a quick movement of the diaphragm, suggesting a bellows. Breathe normally after each cycle.
- Do not do for more than 15 seconds on your first try. Each time you practice the Stimulating Breath, you can increase your time by five seconds or so, until you reach a full minute.

If done properly, you may feel invigorated, comparable to the heightened awareness you feel after a good workout. You should feel the effort at the back of the neck, the diaphragm, the chest and the abdomen. Try this diaphragmatic breathing exercise the next time you need an energy boost and feel yourself reaching for a cup of coffee.
Watch a video of Dr. Weil demonstrating the Stimulating Breath.

Breathing Exercise 2:

The 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise

The 4-7-8 breathing exercise is utterly simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Although you can do it 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.

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

Note that with this breathing technique, 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 (click for demonstration).

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.

This breathing 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. 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 or stress. Use it to help you fall asleep. This exercise cannot be recommended too highly. Everyone can benefit from it.

Watch a video of Dr. Weil demonstrating the 4-7-8 Breath.

Breathing Exercise 3:

Breath Counting

If you want to get a feel for this challenging work, try your hand at breath counting, a deceptively simple breathing technique much used in Zen practice.

Sit in a comfortable position with the spine straight and head inclined slightly forward. Gently close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then let the breath come naturally without trying to influence it. Ideally it will be quiet and slow, but depth and rhythm may vary.

- To begin the exercise, count "one" to yourself as you exhale.
- The next time you exhale, count "two," and so on up to "five."
- Then begin a new cycle, counting "one" on the next exhalation.

Never count higher than "five," and count only when you exhale. You will know your attention has wandered when you find yourself up to "eight," "12," even "19."

Try to do 10 minutes of this form of meditation.

Watch a video of Dr. Weil demonstrating Breath Counting.

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