

# The 4-7-8 Breathing Technique

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## A Simple, Science-Backed Tool for Instant Calm

*From The Universal Group Wellness Program*

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## What is the 4-7-8 Breathing Technique?

The 4-7-8 breathing technique is a powerful relaxation method developed by Dr. Andrew Weil, based on ancient yogic breathing practices (pranayama). This simple exercise can help you:

- **Reduce anxiety** in moments of stress
- **Fall asleep faster** when your mind is racing
- **Manage anger** and emotional reactions
- **Lower blood pressure** and heart rate
- **Improve focus** during overwhelming situations

The best part? It takes less than 2 minutes and can be done anywhere, anytime.

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## How It Works

The 4-7-8 technique works by activating your parasympathetic nervous system—your body's natural "rest and digest" mode. By extending your exhale longer than your inhale, you signal to your brain that it's safe to relax.

**The Science:** - Slow, controlled breathing reduces cortisol (stress hormone) - Holding your breath increases oxygen in the bloodstream - Extended exhales activate the vagus nerve, promoting calm

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# Step-by-Step Instructions

## Preparation

1. Find a comfortable seated position with your back straight
2. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge behind your upper front teeth
3. Keep your tongue there throughout the entire exercise
4. You will exhale through your mouth around your tongue (it may feel awkward at first—that's normal!)

## The Technique

**Step 1: Empty your lungs** - Exhale completely through your mouth, making a "whoosh" sound

**Step 2: Inhale through your nose (4 counts)** - Close your mouth - Inhale quietly through your nose - Count to 4 in your head

**Step 3: Hold your breath (7 counts)** - Hold the breath for a count of 7 - Stay relaxed—don't tense up

**Step 4: Exhale through your mouth (8 counts)** - Exhale completely through your mouth, making a "whoosh" sound - Count to 8

**Step 5: Repeat** - This completes one cycle - Repeat the cycle 3 more times for a total of **4 breath cycles**

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## When to Use 4-7-8 Breathing

- ✓ Before a stressful meeting or presentation
  - ✓ When you feel anxiety rising
  - ✓ Before bed to help you fall asleep
  - ✓ After a difficult conversation
  - ✓ During your lunch break to reset
  - ✓ When you feel overwhelmed by your to-do list
  - ✓ In traffic or during your commute
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## Tips for Success

**Start slow:** If holding your breath for 7 counts feels uncomfortable, try a 2-3.5-4 ratio instead (inhale 2, hold 3.5, exhale 4). Gradually work up to the full 4-7-8.

**Practice twice daily:** Do 4 breath cycles in the morning and 4 before bed. Consistency builds the habit and increases effectiveness.

**Don't overdo it:** Stick to 4 cycles at a time for the first month. Doing too many rounds can make you feel lightheaded.

**Be patient:** The technique becomes more effective with regular practice. You may not feel dramatic results immediately, but over time, your body will respond more quickly.

**Use reminders:** Set phone alarms or calendar reminders to practice at the same time each day.

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## Common Questions

**Q: Why do I feel dizzy?**

A: You may be breathing too forcefully or doing too many cycles. Breathe gently and stick to 4 cycles at a time.

**Q: Can I do this lying down?**

A: Yes! This technique is excellent for falling asleep. Just be aware you may drift off mid-practice.

**Q: What if I can't hold my breath for 7 counts?**

A: That's okay! Use a shorter ratio (like 2-3-4) and gradually increase as your lung capacity improves.

**Q: How long until I see results?**

A: Some people feel calmer immediately. For others, it takes 4-6 weeks of daily practice to notice significant changes in stress levels.

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## Try It Right Now

Let's practice together:

1. Sit comfortably and place your tongue behind your upper teeth
2. Exhale completely through your mouth (whoosh!)
3. Inhale through your nose for 4 counts
4. Hold for 7 counts
5. Exhale through your mouth for 8 counts (whoosh!)
6. Repeat 3 more times

**How do you feel?** Notice any changes in your body, mind, or emotions.

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## Additional Stress Management Resources

- **Wellness Hub:** Explore stress management articles, videos, and quizzes
  - **EAP Services:** Call 1-844-671-3327 for confidential counseling and stress management support
  - **Mindfulness Workshops:** Check your email for upcoming sessions on meditation and resilience
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## Remember

Stress is a normal part of life, but you have the power to manage how it affects you. The 4-7-8 breathing technique is a free, portable tool that's always available when you need it.

**Practice makes progress. Be patient with yourself.**

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*For questions or support, contact HR or visit the Wellness Hub.*