

The 4-7-8 Technique: Breathing for Anxiety

The 4-7-8 breathing technique, also known as “relaxing breath,” involves breathing in for 4 seconds, holding the breath for 7 seconds, and exhaling for 8 seconds. This breathing pattern aims to reduce anxiety or help people get to sleep. There is limited scientific research to support most methods of breathing but there is a lot of anecdotal evidence to suggest that this type of deep, rhythmic breathing is relaxing and may help ease people into sleep. The 4-7-8 breathing technique requires a person to focus on taking a long, deep breath in and out. Rhythmic breathing is a core part of many meditation and yoga practices as it promotes relaxation.

The 4-7-8 breathing technique can help with the following:

- reducing anxiety
- helping a person get to sleep
- managing cravings
- controlling or reducing anger responses

How to do it

Before starting the breathing pattern, adopt a comfortable sitting position and place the tip of the tongue on the tissue right behind the top front teeth. Focus on the following breathing pattern:

- empty the lungs of air
- breathe in quietly through the nose for 4 seconds
- hold the breath gently without gasping for a count of 7 seconds
- exhale deliberately through the mouth, pursing the lips and making a “whoosh” sound, for 8 seconds
- repeat the cycle up to 4 times

It is recommended that people use the technique at least twice a day to start seeing the benefits. It is also suggested that people avoid doing more than four breath cycles in a row until they have more practice with the technique. A person may feel lightheaded after doing this for the first few times. Therefore, it is advisable to try this technique when sitting or lying down to prevent dizziness or falls.

The total number of seconds that the pattern lasts for is less important than keeping the ratio. A person who cannot hold their breath for long enough may try a shorter pattern instead, such as:

- breathe in through the nose for 2 seconds
- hold the breath for a count of 3.5 seconds
- exhale through the mouth for 4 seconds

If a person maintains the correct ratio, they may notice benefits after several days or weeks of doing 4-7-8 breathing consistently one to two times a day.

Adapted from an article at <https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/324417#about>