

Weekly Wellness Tip – The 4-7-8 Breathing Exercise

Welcome to the first of our new weekly wellness tips. We hope this information will be of benefit – share this with your family and friends! We encourage your feedback and invite you to share your personal experience.

Clinical studies with thousands of participants spanning over 30 years offer persuasive evidence that the most significant factor in health and longevity is how well we breathe. Studies have shown that how well our lungs function may predict how long we live and have shown a relationship between the amount of oxygen in the blood and an increase/decrease in illness and disease. The more oxygen, the healthier we are!

Because we don't have to actively think about breathing, it's easy to take it for granted. Often time, taking a deep relaxing breath is a conscious effort. Breathing techniques are used in meditation, yoga, various forms of exercise and sports and even natural childbirth.

We want to share a breathing technique with you called 4-7-8. This technique comes to us from Dr. Andrew Weil, a noted physician specializing in health and wellness. More information is available at his website www.drweil.com.

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

Here's how it works: Sit with your back straight while learning the exercise, then it can be done in any position that's comfortable. 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. 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 time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important however. 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 exercise is helpful to relax your nervous system (without the use of drugs). It's recommended to do it at least twice a day; you can not do it too frequently. Don't do more than four breaths at any one time during the first month of practice; after the first month, you can increase the number of breaths up to eight. Should you feel light headed when you first breathe this way, it will pass so don't be concerned. Once you learn this technique, you will have it available at any time. It can be used whenever you are anxious, afraid or feeling tense. It can be used as a sleep aid or to calm the body when something happens that's upsetting.

Consider practicing this breathing on a regular basis, perhaps in association with daily activities to help you remember. Use it upon waking, at meal time, rest breaks, in the evening or any time you want to become centered and calm.

The many benefits of breathing include reduced mental and physical fatigue as well as improved blood flow and oxygenation. The action of our diaphragms massages internal organs and helps eliminate toxic wastes, strengthening our immune system.

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