

WELL-BEING WEEK IN LAW

ACTIVITY PLANNING GUIDE



WELL-BEING WEEK IN LAW

MON



STAY STRONG

Physical Well-Being

TUES



ALIGN

Spiritual Well-Being

WEDS



ENGAGE & GROW

Career & Intellectual Well-Being

THURS



CONNECT

Social Well-Being

FRI



FEEL WELL

Emotional Well-Being

Activity Title:

The 4-7-8 Breathing Exercise (Yep, Breathing!)

Well-Being Dimension:

Physical Well-Being

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Activity Objective:

To experiment with a very simple tool that professional athletes, [battle-tested soldiers](#), yoga practitioners, experienced marksmen, and other normal people like us use to calm down their minds and bodies, to be able to achieve maximum levels of performance and improve decision-making under pressure.

Well-Being Connection (How/Why Does this Work?)

“If we’re breathing slowly, it actually turns on the anti-stress response.” —Elissa Epel, Ph.D.

[Research has shown](#) that breathing practice can help people feel calmer in everyday life and during moments of acute stress.

Procedure

What Is The 4-7-8 Breathing Technique?

The “4-7-8” breathing technique is a breathing pattern popularized and promoted by [Dr. Andrew Weil](#) and believed to be derived from an ancient yoga practice called pranayama. It is useful for calming anxiety, regulating the body’s “fight, flight, or freeze” stress response, and even for falling asleep more quickly.

How Does The Technique Calm Stress?

Stress typically activates the sympathetic nervous system, signaling one’s body to go into “fight-flight-or-freeze” mode. (Consider the last time you experienced “racing thoughts,” intense fear, or a noticeably elevated heart rate.)

During a stress reaction, stress hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol are released, and we experience physical symptoms such as a faster heartbeat, quicker breathing, and constricted blood vessels. Deep breathing exercises can help activate the parasympathetic nervous system, which controls the relaxation response.

Procedure

By slowing down and regulating the pace of your breathing, your brain begins signaling the rest of your body that there is no real “threat,” and that you can begin the physical process of relaxation and calming. Breathing patterns such as 4-7-8 can thusly help catalyze a state of deep relaxation.

Holding your breath for a specific amount of time is believed to allow your body to replenish its oxygen, giving your brain and other organs a much-needed oxygen boost. It also can help bring your body back into balance and regulate the fight-or-flight response triggered by a stressful situation of event (or series of events). In the words of Dr. Weil, it can serve as a “natural tranquilizer for the nervous system.”

The Benefit Of Oddness

The 4-7-8 pattern in particular forces your mind and body to focus on regulating the breath. The oddness of the pattern, and the proportions in which you alternately inhale, hold your breath and exhale, both send calming signals to the heart and lungs, bringing them back to a more regulated state.

Don't believe us? Test it out and see for yourself.

Getting Started

Taking Inventory: Notice how you are feeling before conducting the exercise:

- Pay attention to your thoughts, and any part of your body where you may be feeling stress or tension.
- After completing the exercise, perform a similar inventory, and then immediately afterwards. How do you feel now?
- Try it a few more times, and particularly any time you have just received really bad news, made (or found) a significant mistake, or gotten into a heated conversation.

Get Comfortable. Ideally, you should find a place to sit or lie down comfortably; however, this breathing pattern can be done while standing, as well. Do the following steps, all in one breath cycle:

1. Exhale completely through your mouth, emptying your lungs as much as possible.
2. Close your lips and inhale silently through your nose while counting (in your head) “1 (beat) 2 (beat) 3 (beat) 4 (beat)” with each “beat” just representing a brief pause. (You can also say “1 Mississippi 2 Mississippi... “ etc.) The speed or slowness its not as important as the rhythmic pattern, but aim for approximately 1 second per count.
3. Hold your breath while counting to 7, in the same rhythm.
4. Exhale through your mouth while counting to 8, in the same rhythm.

Procedure

Repeat 3 Times: Repeat the above steps 3 more times, for a total of four full breath cycles. While first beginning, it is recommended that you not exceed 4 breath cycles in one sitting. Over time, you can increase to 8 cycles in one sitting, but **DO NOT EXCEED 8 BREATH CYCLES.**

Daily Practice

For maximum effectiveness, Dr. Weil recommends practicing this pattern at least 2x per day. You may feel some lightheadedness the first few times. It is also suggested that the results will be more noticeable if you practice the 4-7-8 pattern consistently 2x per day for 8 weeks.

As you become more comfortable with it, you can employ it on an as needed basis, and particularly in response to particular stressors.

Box Breathing

Another practice you can try is box breathing or “square breathing,” which is very similar to 4-7-8.

- This pattern involves exhaling completely, breathing in through the nose for a count of 4, holding your breath for a count of 4, exhaling through the mouth for a count of 4, and again holding your breath for another 4 count before repeating.
- Visualize the 4 sides of a square, or box, as you breathe, to signify the equal count or duration of each portion of the interval.

Resources

Video Demonstrations

Video demonstrations of breathing exercises by Dr. Andrew Weil can be found [here](#).

Recommended Apps for Your Smartphone:

- 1 [Breathe - 1 Minute Meditation](#): This app takes you through the 4-7-8 breathing technique and allows you to set up reminders.
- 2 [3 Minute Mindfulness](#): Prompts you to schedule 3-minute breath breaks throughout the day, with several different patterns to choose from, depending on whether your goal is to energize your body or calm your mind.
- 3 [Box Breathe](#): Uses visual prompts or cues for how many seconds to breathe in, hold, and exhale in the “box” pattern.
- 4 [Calm](#): Bills itself as the “#1 app for Sleep, Meditation and Relaxation, with over 100 million downloads and over 1.5M+ 5-star reviews.” Apple Best of 2018 Award, Apple’s App of the Year 2017, Google Play Editor’s Choice 2018, and named by the Center for Humane Technology as “the world’s happiest app.”

Author

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