

# The Healing Benefits of Breath



*"If I had to limit my advice on healthier living to just one tip, it would be simply to learn how to breathe correctly. There is no single more powerful - or more simple - daily practice to further your health and well being than breathwork." Dr. Andrew Weil*

You take 25,000 breaths every day. Breathing does not require conscious effort or thought, but the way you breathe impacts everything from your psychological to physical health and well-being.

## Focus On Your Breath

Do you pay close attention to the way you breathe? Most people do not. But focusing on and controlling your breathing can be a powerful remedy – one that lies within you. Breathing is an accessible tool that you can use to help you in times of stress. By simply slowing down your breathing, you can assist in calming or regulating other organ systems within the body.

## Breathe to Relax

Pay attention to your body and breath when you are experiencing stress. You may notice that your breathing is quick and shallow, or that your heart rate speeds up.

If you can slow down your breathing, you can influence your body's response and bring it back to a state of relaxation. We are hard-wired to respond to stressors with a "flight or fight" reaction, which is characterized by a surge of stress hormones. While we can't consciously control our heart rate, we CAN regulate our breath which in turn will activate the parasympathetic nervous system, the branch of our nervous system that promotes rest and relaxation. Try this next time you encounter a stressful situation, or experience sleeplessness due to anxiety or worry. Focusing on your breath is also a way to shift your attention away from the stressor or negative thought, which in and of itself can have a calming effect.

## Low and Slow

Tune into your breathing pattern. Notice if your breathing is up high in the chest or down low in the belly. It's a good practice to breathe deeper and slower, down into the belly. Exhaling longer can help you slow down your breath. Practice this regularly, and you will begin to experience the healing potential of your own breath.



## Dr. Weil's 4-7-8 Breathing Technique

This ancient yogic breathing technique can help you to gain control over your breathing. Dr. Weil has described this as a "natural tranquilizer for the nervous system." This style of breathing can provide an oxygen boost to tissues and organs while calming the mind.

**Find a calm place** to sit down or lie comfortably.

**Exhale completely through your lips**, allowing for a whooshing sound.

**Next, inhale through your nose** for 4 seconds.

**Hold onto that breath** for 7 seconds.

**Exhale through your mouth** for 8 seconds, allowing for a whooshing sound.

**Repeat this for four full breaths.**