

The Relaxation Response: A Stress Reduction Tool

For thousands of years, humans have been practicing relaxation and meditation as a way to reduce stress and anxiety. Recently, science has demonstrated the significant benefits of intentional relaxation for both physical and mental health. This handout gives a simple method for bringing about the relaxation response.

What is the relaxation response? The relaxation response is a specific process that happens within the body that directly combats the sensations of stress or the “fight or flight” response that occurs when your body senses danger. It provides a deep state of calm and reduces the negative effects of stress and anxiety.

4-7-8 Breathing



- First, get your body into a comfortable position. You may sit, stand, or lie down. Do whatever feels best at the moment. You may close your eyes if that helps, but you do not have to.
- Next, just begin to notice your breathing. You don't have to breathe any particular way yet. Just notice where in your body you can feel your breath and observe your own unique rhythm.
- When you are ready to start the exercise, breathe in deeply for 4 seconds, filling your lungs completely.
- Hold your breath in for 7 seconds.
- Exhale for 8 seconds, emptying all of the air from your lungs.
- Repeat this pattern until the relaxation response occurs.

You may count faster or slower depending on your comfort. If you need to take a break, just allow yourself to breathe normally again until you are ready to resume the exercise.

It is a simple exercise, but there are several important points to keep in mind. This is a skill. Practice the skill on your own during non-stressful times and focus on improving your ability to calm your body and achieve relaxation. That way, when you do experience a stressful situation in your life, you will already have the skill required to slow down your body and reduce any anxiety that you might feel.

Practice this exercise 3 times per week when you are in a safe, comfortable space. You may practice this exercise for any length of time that is comfortable for you, but we suggest you try at least 5 minutes.