



# Deep Breathing and Guided Imagery for Relaxation and Sleep

## Deep Breathing Option 1:

### Dr. Andrew Weil's "4-7-8" Technique

from: "Video: Breathing Exercises: 4-7-8 Breath"

The 4-7-8 Breathing Exercise is utterly simple, takes almost no time, requires no equipment and can be done anywhere. Although you can do the exercise in any position, sit with your back straight while learning the exercise. 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.

1. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
2. Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
3. Hold your breath for a count of seven.
4. Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight. This is one breath.
5. 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 absolute time you spend on each phase is not important; the ratio of 4:7:8 is important. 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.



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## Deep Breathing Option 2: Military Relaxation Method

from “Want to Fall Asleep Faster? Military Pilots Use This Hack to Sleep Anywhere in 2 Minutes or Less If it works for people in combat zones, it’ll work for you.”

### 1. Get comfy

Obviously, if you're in your bed, this is a non-issue. But if you're out and about, get into the most comfortable position that's feasible (i.e., lean your seat back if you're in your car; find the most comfortable chair in the conference room if you're napping at work)

### 2. Relax your face

This is key to the whole thing. You have 43 muscles in your face, and they're a big part of how your body knows whether you're stressed. When you fully relax your face, you send a physiological signal to your body that all is well. It's safe to sleep. So close your eyes and relax your whole face: forehead, cheeks, tongue, and jaw. You'll notice as you do this that your breathing naturally starts to deepen and slow. Now make sure your eyes are fully relaxed. You have six muscles in your eye sockets; feel them all go limp.

### 3. Release tension, starting with your shoulders

Let them get heavy, and then let them go completely, as if they were falling down toward your feet. Let the back of your neck relax. Take a deep breath and let it out slowly, releasing any remaining tension (most people store most tension in their shoulders, necks, and jaws).

Now your arms: Feel them get heavy and relax, starting with your dominant side. If you're right-handed, start with your right bicep and feel it relax. If it's not, tense it fully and then let it go slack. Repeat the process with your hands.

Let your legs go limp. Feel your right quad sinking down, getting heavier and heavier. Next your right calf, ankle, and foot. Repeat on the other side.

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### 4. Clear your mind for 10 seconds

Now that you've fully relaxed your body, time to power down your thoughts. (This is like that moment after you switch your iPhone off when it takes another few seconds for it to fully turn off.)

What you really want to avoid are any thoughts that involve movement (“I’ve got to pick up that dry cleaning tomorrow”; “Did I remember to put out the recycling?”). These actually prompt involuntary movement. You don’t realize it, but just thinking about something causes micro-contractions in certain muscles.

Bud Winter, author of “Relax and Win: Championship Performance,” has some tips for what to “think” of instead — and remember, you’re holding this for 10 seconds straight:

First, we want you to fantasize that it is a warm spring day and you are lying in the bottom of a canoe on a very serene lake. You are looking up at a blue sky with lazy, floating clouds. Do not allow any other thought to creep in. Just concentrate on this picture and keep foreign thoughts out, particularly thoughts with any movement or motion involved. Hold this picture and enjoy it for 10 seconds.

In the second sleep-producing fantasy, imagine that you are in a big, black, velvet hammock and everywhere you look is black. You must also hold this picture for 10 seconds.

The third trick is to say the words “don’t think ... don’t think ... don’t think,” etc. Hold this, blanking out other thoughts for at least 10 seconds.

And that’s it. When you have a fully relaxed body and a mind that’s still for 10-plus seconds, you will fall asleep, period.



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## **Deep Breathing Option 3: Diaphragmatic Breathing**

from The Cleveland Clinic - Diaphragmatic Breathing

Diaphragmatic breathing, or “belly breathing,” involves fully engaging the stomach, abdominal muscles, and diaphragm when breathing. This means actively pulling the diaphragm down with each inward breath. In this way, diaphragmatic breathing helps the lungs fill more efficiently.

1. Lie down on a flat surface with a pillow under the head and pillows beneath the knees. Pillows will help keep the body in a comfortable position.
2. Place one hand on the middle of the upper chest.
3. Place the other hand on the stomach, just beneath the rib cage but above the diaphragm.
4. To inhale, slowly breathe in through the nose, drawing the breath down toward the stomach. The stomach should push upward against the hand, while the chest remains still.
5. To exhale, tighten the abdominal muscles and let the stomach fall downward while exhaling through pursed lips. Again, the chest should remain still.

Practice this breathing exercise for 5–10 minutes at a time, around three to four times each day.



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## Guided Imagery for Relaxation

from "Stress Management: Doing Guided Imagery to Relax," Kaiser Permanente

Find a comfortable place to sit or lie down. Close your eyes.

Start by just taking a few deep breaths to help you relax.

Picture a setting that is calm and peaceful. This could be a beach, a mountain setting, a meadow, or a scene that you choose.

Imagine your scene, and try to add some detail. For example, is there a breeze? How does it feel? What do you smell? What does the sky look like? Is it clear, or are there clouds?

It often helps to add a path to your scene. For example, as you enter the meadow, imagine a path leading you through the meadow to the trees on the other side. As you follow the path farther into the meadow you feel more and more relaxed.

When you are deep into your scene and are feeling relaxed, take a few minutes to breathe slowly and feel the calm.

Think of a simple word or sound that you can use in the future to help you return to this place.

Then, when you are ready, slowly take yourself out of the scene and back to the present. Tell yourself that you will feel relaxed and refreshed and will bring your sense of calm with you.

Count to 3, and open your eyes. Notice how you feel right now.

It may help to have an instructor or audio recording to follow. You can also use a script (a set of written instructions), but hearing the instructions may be a better way to relax into the process.