

RELAX BY SIMPLY BREATHING - USING THE 7/11 BREATHING METHOD

This is a particular form of breathing which can be a great help (no matter what state you are in) if you...

- Feel agitated or anxious
- Suffer from “nerves” or anxiety
- Have trouble getting to sleep
- Have difficulty concentrating
- Feel depressed

In fact it can be used in any situation where you need to remain calm, especially when you may not be able to sit down and close your eyes, or maybe if you are in a public place and need to feel calm quickly.

The secret is to make each “outbreath” last longer than each “in” breath. This has the effect of stimulating the parasympathetic nervous system, the body’s natural relaxation mechanism which will naturally relax you and counteract any feelings of anxiety which are not being useful to you. A simple and effective way to do this is to use a simple counting method whilst paying attention to your breathing.

7/11 BREATHING

Remember, you can do it anywhere – in bed, on a bus or the train, even whilst walking gently.



Count 1 to 7

First, count from one to seven
on each “in” breath



Count 1 to 11

. . . then, counting at the same
rate, count from one to eleven
on each “out” breath

Picture: IN8 - www.in8.uk.com/



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Why count?

Counting has the effect of distracting your mind so that it can't also be worrying or analysing stuff at the same time. It also helps to keep the "out" breath "half as long again" than the "in" breath. Note that you will have to breathe in slightly "harder" and breathe out "more gently" if you are not going to end up gasping for air!

How long for?

Most people find that 10 to 15 minutes a day of good 7/11 breathing really helps them. But it does take a little practice and needs to be learned as a new skill. It can be hard to keep count when you first start – but keep trying. You will need to concentrate quite hard at first – but it gets easier with practice.

It's a bit like learning to ride a bicycle. When you start, you may find that as you get a bit more relaxed, your mind wanders off in a daydream and you forget to count. Think of this like having to put your foot down to stabilise yourself on the bicycle. Don't give up – just try again. Once you can get to the end of the lane and back without taking your feet off the pedals, you have mastered the new skill. If you find that you have stopped counting, just start again and continue until you can do it for a full fifteen minutes. By the time you can keep it going continuously with at least part of your mind on the counting you will have mastered a valuable new skill.

Use your imagination too

It can really help if you can imagine yourself in a place which feels safe and calm while you do this. Some people imagine being on a warm beach, some a cool garden, others by a gentle stream or walking in a wood or in the hills. Other people prefer to imagine being curled up in their bed. Whatever works best for you, try to bring in all your senses into this imaginary picture. Wherever you choose to be, bring in the sights, colours, sounds, feelings (e.g. sun on your skin), taste or smell of the place you are thinking of. Using all your senses, even just pretending, can really help your body and mind to relax. Some people have never experienced anywhere which feels safe or calm. This makes it harder – but there is often something which works, even if it is getting lost in a video game or a physical activity such as running. Your imagination is a powerful tool. Practice using it.

Easy Instructions

The way to learn this amazingly easy yet effective relaxation technique is to:

- Settle yourself comfortably in a place where you won't be disturbed. Make sure your clothes are loose.
- Sit or lie comfortably with your hands side by side in your lap, or your arms by your side, and your legs uncrossed. Align your head over your body in a position where your head seems to have no weight.



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- Close your eyes.
- Now concentrate on becoming aware of your feet on the floor, your legs and arms where they are resting and your head against the cushion, pillow, or chair back.
- Keep your shoulders down and breathe through the nose slowly, deeply and evenly from the diaphragm, i.e. your tummy moves in and out as if it had a balloon inflating when you breathe in, and deflating as you breathe out. (it can be helpful to put your hand on your tummy to feel it inflating like a balloon, as this lets you know that you're doing it right).
- Breathe in for a count of 7, counting the numbers to yourself in your head.
- Breathe out at the same speed for a count of 11, counting the numbers to yourself in your head. It's important that each outbreath lasts longer than your in-breath because the out breath stimulates the body's natural relaxation response. By changing your pattern of breathing in this way, your body automatically begins to relax.
- Do this between 10 and 20 times, knowing that you will relax more with each breath.
- If you can't breathe out for a count of 11, hold your breath for the remainder of the time while you keep counting to 11 and then breathe in again. Alternatively, try breathing in to the count of 3 and out, more slowly, to the count of 5.
- Concentrate on the counting (if your mind wanders off, gently bring it back to the count) and feel the welcome sense of calm gradually flowing in. Get a sense of much less tense you feel, just by breathing in this way and blocking out your over-busy thoughts.

Summary

7-11 Breathing is just one step in helping towards mental and physical well-being. The key to this relaxation response is to breathe from the diaphragm and to breathe out for longer than you breathe in, so whether it is 7:11 or 5:8 or 3:5, really doesn't matter. Remember the technique is good for instant relaxation too. Just do it a few times wherever you are. No one will know you're doing it, so there's no embarrassment to fear.

A FEW MINUTES CALM IS A WONDERFUL GIFT TO YOURSELF