Breathing Exercises

Introduction

Learning deep breathing techniques is one of the first steps in managing our reactions to certain situations and being able to regulate our emotions. When we are anxious our breathing rate automatically increases and affects our ability to remain calm and regulate stress. Focusing on our breath does two things; it enables us to control and slow our breathing down and it allows us to ground ourselves in the present moment.

Breathing exercises are often the first step to regulating your emotions and it can be practiced anywhere. It is often helpful to start by practicing every day even when you are calm and then it can be a great tool to use when you are feeling stressed and help you to manage your emotions and thoughts.

Dr. Weil's 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise

This 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**.

5. This is one breath. 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.

Do it at least twice a day. You cannot do it too frequently. Do not do more than four breaths at one time for the first month of practice. Later, if you wish, you can extend it to eight breaths. If you feel a little lightheaded when you first breathe this way, do not be concerned; it will pass.

Once you develop this technique by practicing it every day, it will be a very useful tool that you will always have with you. Use it whenever anything upsetting happens - before you react. Use it whenever you are aware of internal tension. Use it to help you fall asleep. This exercise cannot be recommended too highly. Everyone can benefit from it.