

Stress Management and Mindfulness

Square Breath/4-7-8 Breathing Script

This mindful meditation is all about breathing! We'll experience 2 different techniques designed to reduce stress. The first one is called square breath or box breathing, and involves slow, deep breaths. It's used by athletes, Navy SEALs and police officers to manage stress, increase concentration and heighten performance. The second is the 4-7-8 breath, which involves different timing for each part of the breath. This breath works as a powerful stress reliever, calming the nervous system. Many people find that this technique helps them when they have trouble falling asleep or staying asleep.

Anyone can benefit from these mindful breaths, which can be practiced throughout the day – anytime you need to take a moment for yourself.

It's best to practice breathing techniques in a quiet environment, where you can focus on your breath. Find a place free from interruption. Although you can practice mindful breathing anywhere, let's practice in a comfortable chair, sitting back in the chair, posture tall, with your shoulders relaxed away from your ears. Place your hands, palms up, on your thighs and begin to notice your breathing.

As you inhale, relax your belly and allow it to fill with air. Exhale and feel your belly gently moving in toward your spine. Take a few moments to even out your breathing – exhale, then inhale - smooth and easy.

We'll begin the square breath, by exhaling through the nose – completely emptying the air from your lungs. Pause for 4 counts without allowing yourself to close off the back of your throat. As you inhale this time, count slowly to 4. Imagine that you are filling up your entire lungs, bottom to top - even feeling your belly expand.

Once you have a full breath, hold the breath in for 4 counts.

Now, exhale for 4 counts - counting at the same slow pace. Be conscious of the feeling of the lungs emptying. If pausing the breath is uncomfortable at any time, return to your natural pattern of breathing.

To continue, once the air has left your lungs, hold for 4 counts at the bottom of the breath before breathing in for 4 counts.

Count 4 beats as you retain your breath in your lungs.

Consciously exhale for 4 counts, then hold the breath out for 4 counts, remaining still with the lungs empty of air.

We can now return to our normal breathing - gentle, without effort or tension.

The key to the next breathing technique is to remember the numbers 4, 7 and 8. Place the tip of your tongue on tissue right behind your upper front teeth. Keep it there for this entire breathing process. We will be inhaling through our nose and exhaling through the mouth.

Let's start by exhaling as much air as possible from the lungs.

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Inhale through your nose as your count to 4 in your mind.

Hold the breath in your lungs and count to seven.

Keeping your tongue in place behind your front teeth, exhale for the count of 8 with a whoosh. This is the fun part!

Remember, if holding the breath is uncomfortable at any time, simply breathe naturally.

Now, let's go through this same process - 4-7-8 – another time or two. Inhaling for four, three, two, one.

Holding your breath in your lungs as you count seven, six, five, four, three, two, one.

Exhale slowly with a whoosh to an 8 count.

Return to your normal breathing pattern. If you have closed your eyes, feel free to open them and shift your body. Scoot forward in your chair with your hands on your thighs, palms down rounding the back and then arching your back gently a few times.