

Paced Respiration

Paced Respiration is one of the easiest relaxation techniques to use that has scientific evidence supporting its efficacy. There is evidence that doing just a few minutes daily can help lower blood pressure and increase the number of Killer T Cells in our blood. It has also been used successfully to reduce anger, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and night eating syndrome.

Relaxing is a skill that can be learned. Various methods of relaxation have been demonstrated in scientific studies to have beneficial health effects, e.g., Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), Diaphragmatic Breathing, Paced Respiration, and Guided Imagery.

Most behaviors are largely dominated by one nervous system or the other. Breathing is a unique and interesting behavior because it is both involuntarily and voluntarily controlled, i.e., if you try not to breathe, your body will try to do it anyway it can. Likewise you can willfully change your breathing rate. In addition, the rate of respiration is both a response, but also can affect other bodily symptoms. So, if we become stressed, our breaths may become shallow, rapid, and thoracic (chest breathing). Therefore it can be used to monitor our body's response to stress. But, we can also take control of it, and by slowing down our breaths, we can reduce the stress response.

In general, stress is reduced by slowing down the whole cycle (inhale-hold-exhale). In particular, slowing the exhale, especially in relation to the inhale, is particularly important for reducing the stress response.

Two different counts are going to be suggested for you to try, to see if either are helpful and which is most comfortable. But, keep in mind, slowing the exhale is the goal, so any change in that direction is progress. Straining to hit the exact counts will be counter productive. Just use the counts as general guidelines to experiment with how you can slow your breathing cycle.

“4-7-8 Breathing”

After finding a comfortable position

1. Inhale gently through your nose (& mouth if necessary) to a “4” count
2. Hold your breath at the top to a “7” count, while doing your best to let go of tension in your face and shoulders
3. Exhale from your mouth very slowly to about a count of “8” before inhaling again

“Paced Pursed Respiration (PPR)”

After finding a comfortable position

1. Inhale gently through your nose (& mouth if necessary) to a “4” count
2. Hold your breath at the top to a “4” count, while doing your best to let go of tension in your face and shoulders
3. Purse your lips as small as if you were holding a drinking straw in them, and exhale from your mouth, keeping your lips so small, that the air has to leave very slowly, to a count of about “8”
4. (Optional) Again, hold your breath at the bottom to a “4” count, while doing your best to let go of tension in your face and shoulders, before inhaling again.

Paced Respiration

Can you practice both 4-7-8 and PPR a few times this week- doing 4-10 cycles of each? How uncomfortable or difficult was it? How did you feel after? Which do you prefer?

When did you do it? What times and situations, may be helpful to do it in the future?

Date	Time	Notes
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

It may be helpful to begin to become more aware of how you typically breathe when calm, in different locations, times of day, when stressed, emotional, or when you are around different people. Can you begin to lightly monitor your breathing every once and awhile this week?

What did you notice? Were there any interesting patterns or surprises? How often were you naturally breathing with your diaphragm without thinking about it?
