

Trouble Sleeping? Try the 7-4-8 Breathing Method

I don't usually talk about this, but after I was unexpectedly fired from my job of 18+ years, I felt the stress.

Where will I come up with the money for the mortgage? How will I find a job locally that will pay the same as I was making? Will I be able to make it?

It isn't surprising that I was losing hair and losing sleep.

During that time, I tried several techniques to help me sleep, and the need for trying was serious as on many days I was waking up at 4 in the morning and just couldn't get back to sleep.

One of the methods I tried, and I found worked best for me, is the 7-4-8 breathing method. Simply put, you breathe in while counting to 7, then keep your breath in for 4 counts, and finish by slowly breathing out for 8 breaths.

It takes some practice to go slowly but then you can absolutely reap its benefits.

This method was apparently pioneered by Dr. Andrew Weil, who recommends exhaling completely before you start and make a "whoosh" sound from your mouth as you do so. Then close your mouth and breathe silently 7 inhalations, keep the breath in for 4 counts, and then 8 exhalations. Do this 4 times total, or repeat until you fall asleep.

The movement of your body will send a signal of relaxation and calm to your mind. The regulation of your breath also helps relax your muscles as oxygen fills the lungs deeply.

Being truly focused on the three part count means your mind can't get distracted by our daily burdens such as bills to

pay, mouths to feed, or lessons to teach.

Using this method, I find that by concentrating on the count that my body feels heavier and if I can be really still, I start to perceive my mind moving in rhythm to my breath and then fade screen.

This breathing technique has been shown to provide calm for overly anxious people.

When exposed to a triggering situation, anxious individuals can benefit from slowing down their breathing to help them keep focused on, well, nothing.

At least hopefully not whatever was making them anxious.

Some people say if you are using this for anxiety (and I guess when you are alone!), that each time you finishing exhaling to blow out your mouth so that your lips flap and make a fluttering sound. I haven't seen why this is suggested, but my guess is that it gets the anxious energy out all the more fully.

If you are experiencing difficulty sleeping, try this method and see if it helps you fall asleep more quickly.

Download Heather's free 15-minute guided meditation to help you sleep! 