The 4-7-8 (or Relaxing Breath) Exercise

This exercise is fast, simple and can be done anywhere. Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth and keep it there throughout the exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue.

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of 4.
- Hold your breath for a count of 7.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of 8.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

It does not matter how fast or slow you count, only the 4-7-8 ratio matters. But with practice, you will be able to slow the counting and get used to inhaling and exhaling more deeply.

This exercise is a natural tranquilizer. Unlike tranquilizing drugs that are effective initially and lose power over time, this exercise is subtle at first and gains power with repetition. Do it at least twice a day, you cannot do it too frequently. Only do four breaths at a time the first month and then extend to eight if you wish. If you feel lightheaded when you first breathe this way, do not worry! It will pass.

Once you develop this technique by practicing it daily, it will be a useful tool that you always have with you. Use it when something upsetting happens—before you react. Use it when you are aware of internal tension or to help you fall asleep. This exercise can benefit everyone!

Dr. Andrew Weil, MD
www.drweil.com/drw/u/ART00521/three-breathing-exercises.html

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

Get as comfortable as possible. This exercise will help you relax and become aware of where tension is in your body and teach you how to relieve most stress.

Raise your eyebrows as high as possible. Hold the tension for a moment and then relax. Now squeeze your eyes shut. Hold, let tension build then relax and feel the relief from the tension.

Clench your teeth tightly, hold then release your jaw letting it go loose. Now squeeze your whole face. Hold and let tension build as you squeeze your eyes, mouth and nose hard. Then relax. Feel the relief.

Bring your chin slowly down towards your chest. Feel the tension build in your neck and shoulders. Hold it and relax.

Now make a fist with your right hand. Raise your right arm to shoulder height, stretch it out as far as possible, straight ahead. Hold it then relax; letting your arm fall to your side. Do the same with the left fist and arm and then both fists and arms. Feel the relief.

Focus on your stomach and pull these muscles as tight as you can. Hold it, let tension build, and relax.

Now raise your right leg, tensing your thigh and calf muscles and pulling your toes towards you. Hold it. Now put your leg back down and relax. Do the same with your left leg and then both legs.

Now take a moment to think about how the muscles feel throughout your body. Check your nose, shoulders, arms, chest, stomach, legs and feet.

American Lung Association: Deep Breathing
www.lungusa.org

SELF-CARE: Take a Breath to Relax

There are a variety of ways to bring your body into a relaxed, less stressful state. Read these examples and give them a try.

http://lifework.arizona.edu

Rev. 05/13
The Importance of Relaxation

In the past, humans faced dangers that were either immediate, such as animal attacks, or chronic, such as a drought affecting food supply. We developed responses to these stressors that would protect us and help us survive. The fight/flight response is still in play for us today, causing release of hormones that increase heart rate and blood pressure and help reduce blood loss if injured. Rapid, shallow breathing is initiated to increase oxygen to the muscles in case we need to sprint. These mechanisms are necessary for immediate danger, but also occur under stress.

Therefore, it is important for us to find a way to stop this reactive cycle and help return the body to a relaxed state. Breathing is one of the few actions (laughing is another) that resides in both the somatic nervous system (which we can consciously control) and the autonomic system (which we cannot easily access). Breath can be a bridge between the two systems. By consciously slowing down our breathing, we can de-escalate the primal fear response and the resultant stress.

The following breathing exercises have been gathered from various educational sources to help teach you how to stop the stress response and return to a physiologically relaxed state.

Deep Breathing/Muscular Relaxation Exercise:
Take a Mini-Vacation

Time: Approximately 15 minutes

1. Find a comfortable place free from distractions or disturbances.
2. Sit in a comfortable position: both feet on the floor, legs uncrossed, hands resting on armrests or your thighs.
3. Close your eyes.
4. Slow your breathing. Breathe deeply through your nose; make your belly rise as you fill your lungs. Keep your breathing regular—do not hold your breath.
5. Starting at the top of your head, imagine a line descending. As this line slowly comes down your body, relax the particular muscle group in that part of your body. For example, as the line passes your cheeks, focus on relaxing your cheek and jaw muscles. Feel like a scoop of ice cream slowly melting.

Deep Breathing

Correct deep breathing should be done with your belly muscles. Let your stomach go out as far as possible as you inhale allowing you to fill your lungs more completely. Let the air out and feel your stomach return to its normal position. Pause completely at the end of each exhalation until you are ready to take the next deep breath and you feel yourself relaxing. Closing your eyes and focusing on a restful scene or peaceful word can help you achieve greater relaxation.

American Lung Association:
www.lungusa.org