

Breathwork

By Trinity Thomas

Take a moment to breathe—deeply. Through your nose, imagine yourself inhaling from the bottom of your feet to the top of your head. Hold it for a few seconds. Slowly exhale through the mouth. You probably feel a deeper sense of relaxation. This is the beauty of breathwork.

Most of our bodies work with our brains to breathe automatically, so it is easy to allow our breathing to remain an unconscious act. Once we gain awareness of this, we can begin intentional practices that consciously acknowledge the breath, also known as breathwork.

Researchers at the [Stanford University School of Medicine](#) identified a group of nerve cells within the brain that connect breathing to the overall state of mind. These neurons send a message to the brain and determine our level of arousal. This can keep us alert, wake us from sleep, or trigger anxiety. This is why regulating our breathing can lead to whole-body relaxation.

Breath comes in many forms depending on our state of mind. When we are relaxed, our breathing is slow and has depth. Inversely, when we are excited or upset, our breathing is rather quick and shallow. Taking a moment to breathe deeply in times of emotional distress will send the message to the brain and body that we are safe and okay, which will lead us away from stress and into a state of calm.

As the first practice to identify and acknowledge the benefits of breathwork, yoga refers to the breath as *prana*, meaning the life force that flows through us. *Pranayama* refers to the regulation of the breath. The breath, or *prana*, is only one aspect of the practice of yoga, but it plays a key role in finding oneness in the body and reaching a state of relaxation. *Pranayama*, or breathwork, refers to the control of the duration and frequency of each breath we take during the practice. This conscious activity can promote healthy digestion, decrease stress, and improve sleep.

Another study, conducted by the [National Center for Biotechnology Information](#), found that a pranayama breathwork exercise decreased the heart rate and blood pressure of participants.

The 4-7-8 Breathing Method

This breathing method is known to calm the nervous system.

To practice this method of breathwork, first come into a comfortable position. On your next inhale, close your lips and inhale through your nose for a count of four. Then, hold your breath for seven counts.

Exhale audibly through your mouth for a count of eight. This refers to one cycle in the 4-7-8 method. You can then repeat this three times for a total of four cycles. With practice you can, with time, work your way up to eight cycles. Take your time with this gradual increase.