

4 ways to help you fall asleep faster

Having trouble falling asleep? Controlled breathing can help reduce stress in your nervous system, help you feel calm and prepare your brain for sleep. Here are four ways you can achieve a state of relaxation:

1. Counting Breaths

- Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of five. Hold for a count of two. Exhale gently through your mouth for a count of five. Repeat.

2. Meditation and Mindfulness

- Start with slow inhaleds and exhaleds. You don't need to count. Just find a pace that works for you.
- Pay attention to how your body is positioned. Let your muscles relax.
- Notice any sensations in your body. Your goal is to simply stay present.

3. Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Start with slow inhaleds and exhaleds.
- Starting at the top, tense the muscles in your face (jaw, eyes and lips in particular) for 10 seconds, then release. Continue to tense, and then relax your muscles in this order: shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, hands, back, stomach, hamstrings, calves and feet.
- Breathe in and out between each body part.

4. Guided Imagery

- Close your eyes, and picture a place or experience that feels relaxing to you, such as your favorite vacation spot.
- While slowly inhaling and exhaling, imagine each detail of this place, thinking about sights, sounds and smells.
- Allow this imagery to evoke relaxing thoughts and memories.

What if my mind begins to wander?

Don't worry. This is completely normal. Simply acknowledge that your mind has wandered, continue your deep breathing, and bring your mind back to the focus of your attention. If you still can't fall asleep after 20 or 30 minutes, get out of bed for a while and do something soothing, such as reading or listening to relaxing music. Lying in bed for too long can create a frustrating mental connection between your bed and being anxious and awake.

Sources: sleepfoundation.org.

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