

Wind Down & Sleep Better

10 Breathing Techniques & Relaxation Exercises for Quality 8-Hour Sleep

Falling asleep faster is often less about the mind and more about calming the body first. This guide covers 10 breathing techniques and relaxation exercises you can do at night, colour-coded by type, along with how to do each one, why it works, and how long it takes — plus a simple routine at the end to put a few of them together.

Colour Key

Breathing Technique	Physical Relaxation	Mindfulness
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The 10 Techniques

Technique	Type	How to Do It	Why It Helps	Time
1. 4-7-8 Breathing	Breathing Technique	Inhale through the nose for 4 seconds, hold for 7 seconds, exhale slowly through the mouth for 8 seconds. Repeat 4-5 times.	Slows the heart rate and shifts the body out of 'alert mode' and into rest mode.	2-3 min
2. Box Breathing (4-4-4-4)	Breathing Technique	Inhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds, exhale for 4 seconds, hold for 4 seconds. Repeat the cycle.	Creates a steady, predictable rhythm that helps quiet a racing mind before bed.	3-5 min
3. Diaphragmatic (Belly) Breathing	Breathing Technique	Place a hand on your belly and breathe deeply so your belly rises, not your chest. Exhale slowly.	Activates the vagus nerve, which helps lower cortisol and heart rate.	5 min
4. Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shodhana)	Breathing Technique	Close one nostril, inhale through the other, switch nostrils, then exhale. Continue alternating.	Helps balance the nervous system and has traditionally been used to ease pre-sleep restlessness.	3-5 min
5. Humming Bee Breath (Bhramari)	Breathing Technique	Inhale deeply, then exhale slowly while making a low humming sound, keeping lips gently closed.	The vibration from humming has a calming effect on the mind and is traditionally used to ease anxiety before sleep.	2-3 min
6. Extended Exhale Breathing	Breathing Technique	Breathe in for a count of 4, and make your exhale longer, around 6-8 counts. Repeat.	A longer exhale specifically activates the parasympathetic ('rest and digest') nervous system.	3-5 min
7. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)	Physical Relaxation	Starting from your toes and moving up to your head, tense each muscle group for 5 seconds, then release.	Releases the physical tension that builds up in the body over the day, signalling that it's safe to relax.	8-10 min
8. Legs-Up-The-Wall Pose	Physical Relaxation	Lie on your back and rest your legs vertically up against a wall, arms relaxed by your sides.	Encourages blood flow back toward the heart and has a calming effect on the nervous system.	5-10 min
9. Child's Pose Stretch	Physical Relaxation	Kneel and fold forward, extending your arms ahead or by your sides, forehead resting on the mat.	A gentle stretch that releases tension in the back, shoulders, and hips after a long day.	2-3 min

Technique	Type	How to Do It	Why It Helps	Time
10. Body Scan Meditation	Mindfulness	Lying down, mentally scan your body from head to toe, simply noticing sensations without judging them.	Shifts focus away from racing thoughts and toward the present moment, a common trigger for difficulty falling asleep.	5-10 min

Putting It Together: A Simple Nightly Routine

You don't need to do all 10 every night. Here's a simple 15-20 minute sequence combining a few, in order:

- 1. Child's Pose or Legs-Up-The-Wall (5 min) — physically wind the body down first.
- 2. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (8-10 min) — release lingering tension, muscle by muscle.
- 3. 4-7-8 or Box Breathing, once in bed (3 min) — calm the nervous system.
- 4. Body Scan Meditation (5 min) — shift focus away from thoughts and drift off.

Note: These techniques support general relaxation and healthy sleep habits; they are not a treatment for diagnosed insomnia or a sleep disorder. If sleep difficulty is frequent, severe, or affecting daily life, please consult a doctor.