

Box Breathing

What is box breathing?

Box breathing, also known as square breathing, is a technique used when taking slow, deep breaths. It can heighten performance and concentration while also being a powerful stress reliever. It's also called four-square breathing.

This technique can be beneficial to anyone, especially those who want to meditate or reduce stress. It's used by everyone from athletes to U.S. Navy SEALs, police officers, and nurses.

You may find it particularly helpful if you have a lung disease such as chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD).

Getting started with box breathing

Before you get started, make sure that you're seated upright in a comfortable chair with your feet flat on the floor. Try to be in a stress-free, quiet environment where you can focus on your breathing.

Keeping your hands relaxed in your lap with your palms facing up, focus on your posture. You should be sitting up straight. This will help you take deep breaths.

When you're ready, start with step 1.

Step 1: Slowly exhale

Sitting upright, slowly exhale through your mouth, getting all the oxygen out of your lungs. Focus on this intention and be conscious of what you're doing.

Step 2: Slowly inhale

Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose to the count of four. In this step, count to four very slowly in your head.

Feel the air fill your lungs, one section at a time, until your lungs are completely full and the air moves into your abdomen.

Step 3: Hold your breath

Hold your breath for another slow count of four.

Step 4: Exhale again

Exhale through your mouth for the same slow count of four, expelling the air from your lungs and abdomen.

Be conscious of the feeling of the air leaving your lungs.

Step 5: Hold your breath again

Hold your breath for the same slow count of four before repeating this process.

Benefits of box breathing

According to the Mayo Clinic, there's sufficient evidence that intentional deep breathing can actually calm and regulate the autonomic nervous system (ANS).

This system regulates involuntary body functions such as temperature. It can lower blood pressure and provide an almost immediate sense of calm.

The slow holding of breath allows CO₂ to build up in the blood. An increased blood CO₂ enhances the cardio-inhibitory response of the vagus nerve when you exhale and stimulates your parasympathetic system. This produces a calm and relaxed feeling in the mind and body.

Box breathing can reduce stress and improve your mood. That makes it an exceptional treatment for conditions such as generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and depression.

It can also help treat insomnia by allowing you to calm your nervous system at night before bed. Box breathing can even be efficient at helping with pain management.

Tips for beginners

If you're new to box breathing, it may be difficult to get the hang of it. You may get dizzy after a few rounds. This is normal. As you practice it more often, you'll be able to go longer without the dizziness. If you get dizzy, stay sitting for a minute and resume normal breathing.

To help you focus on your breathing, find a quiet, dimly lit environment to practice box breathing. This isn't at all necessary to perform the technique, but it can help you focus on the practice if you're new to it.

Ideally, you'll want to repeat the box breathing cycle four times in one sitting.

Do box breathing several times a day as needed to calm your nerves and relieve stress.

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