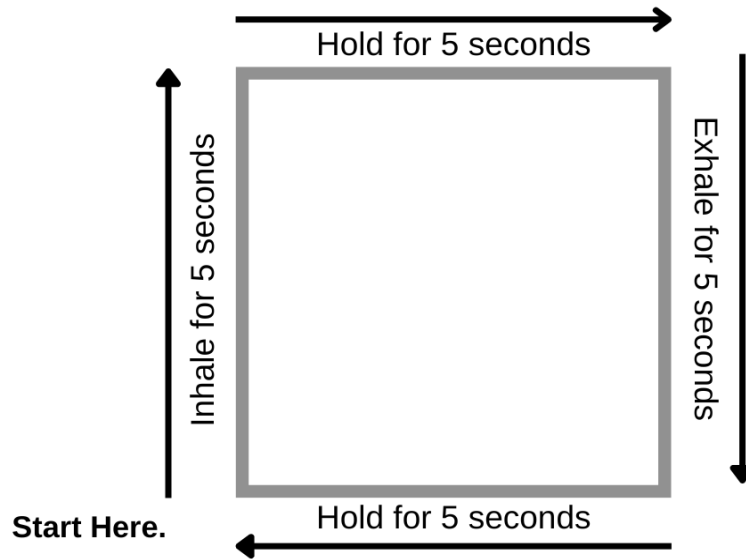


BOX BREATHING



Instructions

1. Inhale through your nose while filling your stomach with air for 5 seconds.
2. Pause for 5 seconds without exhaling.
3. Exhale for 5 seconds through your nose or mouth.
4. Pause for 5 seconds before inhaling.
5. Repeat at least 4-5 times, but keep going if you'd like!

Notes and Variations

- If it is difficult to inhale through your nose, feel free to inhale through your mouth instead.
- Make sure to expand your stomach while inhaling – this is called diaphragmatic breathing and helps activate the parasympathetic nervous system (see below).
- Box breathing, or “square breathing”, is often taught using 4 seconds instead of 5. This is completely fine if 5 is difficult. Anywhere between 3 and 5 should be effective.
- You might find that others teach this technique starting at a different point in the square. Start wherever you like. However, it can be helpful to start as shown above so you can imagine your belly following the direction of the line. When you are inhaling, your belly should be going up. When you are exhaling, your belly will be coming down.

BOX BREATHING

Why Box Breathing works for anxiety

Box breathing works because it allows you to address your anxiety at the level of your body. When you are able to calm your body, your mind will follow. Here's why:

Physically, when you are anxious, your ***sympathetic nervous system*** is highly activated. This is the system that controls the "fight-or-flight" response, and causes your body to be on high alert. When your sympathetic nervous system is more active, your heart rate is higher and your breath is more shallow.

Breathing techniques (at least the ones used to manage anxiety) are designed to extend your breath and lengthen your out-breath, which activates your ***parasympathetic nervous system***.

The parasympathetic nervous system is the yin to the sympathetic nervous system's yang, and is responsible for relaxation and recovery. When your parasympathetic nervous system is more active, your heart rate slows and your body calms down.

It doesn't matter what your mind is doing, your body will slow down and you will be calmer.

This is the great thing about breathing techniques for anxiety. As long as you do them, they will have an effect. Although reflecting on the causes or meanings surrounding your anxiety can be helpful over time (such as in individual therapy), breathing techniques can be used *right now* to influence the way you feel.

Don't forget – for breathing techniques to work, you have to actually use them. Try box breathing a few times right now while you're calm. Then, aim at working it into your routine whenever you start to feel anxious.

The Autonomic Nervous System



- Sympathetic Nervous System**
- Activates "fight or flight" responses.
 - Puts body and mind in an alert state, preparing body for action.
 - Heart rate increases.
 - Highly activated in a state of anxiety.

- Parasympathetic Nervous System**
- Responsible for "rest and digest" functions of the body.
 - Puts body and mind in a state of calm or relaxation.
 - Heart rate decreases.
 - Activation will reduce the amount of anxiety experienced.