

Square Breathing:

How to Reduce Stress Through Breathwork

Square breathing is a type of breathwork that can shift your energy, connect you more deeply with your body, calm your nervous system, and reduce the stress in your body.

It is also referred to as box breathing, 4×4 breathing, and 4-part breath.

Here are instructions for square breathing and some ideas for when to practice the technique. We'll also share tips for making the breathwork as effective as possible.

How square breathing works

Set up for square breathing

If possible, it is usually a good idea to sit in a chair with your back supported. Place both of your feet on the floor. Really feel the support of the chair and floor under you.

You might even think about the layered quality of support with the chair under you, the floor under the chair, the foundation of the building under the floor, and the earth under the building.

Alternatively, you can sit in a seated meditation position or even lie down. The important thing is that your body is open to allow the breath to flow freely.

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Breathe in deeply to bring
your mind home to your
body.

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How to do square breathing

- Begin by slowly exhaling all your air out.
- Then, gently inhale through your nose to a slow count of 4.
- Hold at the top of the breath for a count of 4.
- Then gently exhale through your mouth for a count of 4.
- At the bottom of the breath, pause and hold for the count of 4.
- Setting an intention or image
- You might want to set an intention or invite a neutral or positive image to focus on during your breathing practice. Your intention could be "relaxation," or "healing" -- whatever you find engaging and authentic for you.



If the image of a square works for you, you can imagine your breath and the pauses/holds in between the breath moving around the image of the square.

When to use square breathing

Square breathing can be useful in many situations, including:

- To calm yourself down when faced with stress or feeling overwhelmed
- Before you need to respond to a high stress situation
- When trying to sleep
- To reduce work stress
- To reset your creative juices
- When you need to clear your head
- In a meeting at work
- When setting your intentions for the day
- When making a big decision

Where to practice square breathing

One of the great things about engaging in any breathwork practice is that you can do it anywhere.

It doesn't require a yoga mat, meditation pillow, candle, or essential oils! You can practice this on the train, at work in a meeting, or during a stressful moment with a partner.

However, you can also practice square breathing when you are not in a high stress situation. This gives you extra practice to take this exercise to another level.

Set up the environment to be meditative by dimming the lights or lighting a candle. It can be useful to practice this when you are not stressed, so that it is a familiar resource you can call on during moments of higher stress.

Apps to Try

There are several apps that can help you practice box breathing or other types of paced breathing for stress relief. What's great about these apps is that they can add a visual element to your practice.

If you're a visual learner, you can practice these breathing techniques with the app to the point that you really connect with them, then visualize what you experience in the apps even when you're not using them, like in the shower or while driving. This makes it easier for many people to both learn the techniques and enjoy them more. Here are a few of the top apps for box breathing and other types of paced breathing exercises:

- **Box Breathing App:** This one can be downloaded for Apple or Android devices and has nine levels of use that can help you to really get a firm grasp on the practice of box breathing and make it part of your daily routine. The makers of this app also stress that this technique can also help you achieve a flow state which is an additional benefit you'll enjoy besides the stress management referenced earlier.

- **Breathe 2 Relax:** This app is also available for both Apple and PC—oriented users and has a wide range of timed breathing exercises to use. It was developed by the National Institute for Telehealth and Technology, an organization within the U.S. Department of Defense. One of its strong points is that it has a graph feature that can help you to determine where much of your stress originates.
- **Universal Breathing:** This is also available for iOS and Android users and has a variety of visual exercises that work with your breathing. They become increasingly challenging, helping you to gain more complex skills with your breathing exercises. This can be particularly enjoyable for those who love a challenge and may become bored with an app that may feel repetitive but want the benefits of practicing calming techniques like breathing exercises.

Taking just a few moments out of your day to concentrate and breathe deeply will calm your mind and body, giving you an opportunity to hit the reset button and get refreshed!

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