

# HANDOUT: Responding mindfully / calmly: Box-breath

Category	Subcategory	Group size	Duration	Language
<b>Mindfulness</b>	Mindfulness interventions	Individual	60 minutes	English

## What is box breathing?

Box breathing, also known as square breathing, is a technique used to take 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 (Gotter, 2019).

## Getting started

How many times did you breathe out during the first minute? .....

How do your breath and body feel?

.....  
.....

How many times did you breathe out during the first minute, whilst observing acts of aggression?.....

How do your breath and body feel?

.....  
.....

## Did you know that.....?

In most of these experiments without the display of aggression, the average person breathes around 15 times a minute? And that for an average person, 6 to 8 times is enough?

When aggression is experienced or observed the amount we breathe each minute tends to increase. The more we breathe each minute, the more our heart rate rises and the more stress hormones are being produced.



When stressed we tend to respond from our limbic system, the lesser evolved part of our brain. This often leads to a fight, flight, or freeze response. Having this state of stress-activated too often, or for too long, has adverse consequences on health and intelligence!

When we actively calm our nervous system we are able to access the more evolved part of our brain, the neo-cortex. And it is this part of the brain that helps us to deal with aggression in a far more supportive way.

### **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. 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.

#### **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. 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**

There's sufficient evidence that intentional deep breathing can actually calm and regulate the autonomic nervous system. 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 CO<sub>2</sub> to build up in the blood. Increased blood CO<sub>2</sub> 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.

### **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, keep 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.

### Bibliography

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