**How Box Breathing Can Help You Destress**

This deep-breathing technique is simple but powerful



If you’ve ever felt anxious or overwhelmed, some well-intentioned person has probably given you the advice, “Just breathe.” When you’re in the midst of a stressful moment, though, that can be much easier said than done.

**What is box breathing?**

Box breathing is a form of yogic deep breathing employed by the United States Navy SEALs and by stressed-out people everywhere. It’s also known as *sama vritti pranayama*, born of the yogic practice of pranayama, or focusing on the breath.

Its common name, “box breathing,” refers to the fact that a box has four sides, a concept represented here by breathing while you slowly count to four for a total of four times — four counts of breathing in, four counts of holding your breath, four counts of exhaling and four more counts of holding after your exhale.

This technique goes by other names, too:

* 4×4 breathing.
* 4-4-4-4 breathing.
* Equal breathing.
* Four-square breathing.
* Square breathing.

**Lowers stress**

The biggest benefit of box breathing is relaxation, especially in times of stress. [Studies show](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/31436595/) that regulating your breath can lower levels of the stress hormone cortisol and maybe even help lower blood pressure.

**Activates the parasympathetic nervous system**

In times of stress, your sympathetic nervous system is on high alert. Box breathing can help you move out of that state by tapping into the bodily system responsible for rest and digestion — the parasympathetic nervous system. The parasympathetic nervous system is the opposite of the sympathetic nervous system, otherwise known as “fight or flight.”

**Calms the mind**

You don’t have to be stressed to benefit from this breath exercise. Practicing box breathing is an opportunity to bring mindfulness to your breath, which is a valuable practice even in tranquil times.

**How to do box breathing**

Don’t put too much pressure on yourself to master the box breathing method right away. “You don’t want to go too slowly or too quickly,” Dr. Young says. “Stay at your comfort level, making sure you’re breathing very gently and not straining.”

1. Breathe out slowly, releasing all the air from your lungs.
2. Breathe in through your nose as you slowly count to four in your head. Be conscious of how the air fills your lungs and stomach.
3. Hold your breath for a count of four.
4. Exhale for another count of four.
5. Hold your breath again for a count of four.
6. Repeat for three to four rounds.

*Cleveland Clinic*