

Box Breathing for Stress Management

Abdominal breathing, also called diaphragmatic breathing, can increase oxygen levels in the body and strengthen the diaphragm. Many people feel more relaxed and focused after breathing this way. It is also helpful in processing negative emotions.

Breathing exercises can be practiced anytime, anywhere, and for free, making them an ideal way to manage your stress and support overall well-being. Here are some general guidelines.

Box Breathing:

- Sit or lie down comfortably, with your feet flat on the floor. Put one hand on your upper chest and the other on your abdomen, just under your ribcage. Feel yourself breathing and become aware of how deeply or shallowly you are breathing.
- Take a deep breath, feeling your abdomen rise as you breathe. Your upper hand should move very little while your abdomen lifts your other hand. Imagine a feeling of warmth as the breath moves from your mouth, down your throat, into your lungs, and your diaphragm expands.
- Hold the breath for a count of four. Exhale slowly through your nose for a count of four. Inhale slowly to a count of four, feeling the warmth of your breath and your abdomen rising. Try to keep your chest relatively still. Hold the breath for four counts, then exhale slowly, and repeat.

Consider how your body feels compared to before your box breathing exercise. Do you feel more relaxed? Are your thoughts any different?

Over time, you may not need to involve your hands in abdominal breathing exercises. Variations can include tensing your abdomen slightly at the end of each exhale to push out any remaining air, using visualization, or repeating words of affirmations between breaths. With practice, you will find the rhythm and routine that works best for you.

Five minutes of abdominal breathing daily can support relaxation, decrease stress, and improve one's sense of well-being. However, I recommend practicing an abdominal breathing technique multiple times per day over a few months before deciding if it is an effective stress management strategy for you.

With ample practice, breathing techniques like box breathing can become one of your most effective go-to stress management strategies in the moment, whenever you feel stressed, tired, frustrated, or confused. Abdominal breathing can help you to relax, reset, and refocus.

For additional information please view this link from the Institute for Functional Medicine: <https://www.ifm.org/learning-center/>

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