

Taking a few minutes to practice mindful breathing several times a day is proven to help relax your body and calm your mind, helping to reduce stress levels. These exercises are also useful methods of self-regulation, which is the way we manage our behaviours, emotions and our thoughts – particularly those emotions that can become disruptive. When we self-regulate, we can deal with stresses efficiently and effectively and we return to being calmly focussed and alert.

Choose a place where you can sit upright and comfortably, relaxing the spine and allowing your seat to support you as you sink your weight into it.

The following easy breathing exercises are simple methods to help you to take a moment to pause and concentrate on your breathing.



Exercise 1: Mindful Breathing Using a Mantra

Close your eyes, and as you breathe in, say "inhale calm" (3 syllables) to yourself. Try not to force this.

As you breathe out, say "exhale relax" (4 syllables), and continue this for several minutes. Try to relax your body and sink your weight into your seat on each exhale.

This breathing practice is based on the fact that inhalation is related to your sympathetic nervous system and the fight/flight response. Exhalation is related to your parasympathetic nervous system (rest and digest response). By extending your exhalation, you move away from the flight response, which in turn helps to calm your nervous system.



Exercise 2: Belly Breathing

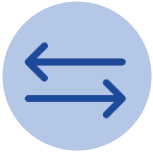
1. As you inhale, try to soften and allow your belly and pelvic floor to expand with the breath.

2. As you exhale, your pelvic floor and abdominal muscles will gently recoil together in order to release the air.

Try to add Rib Expansion

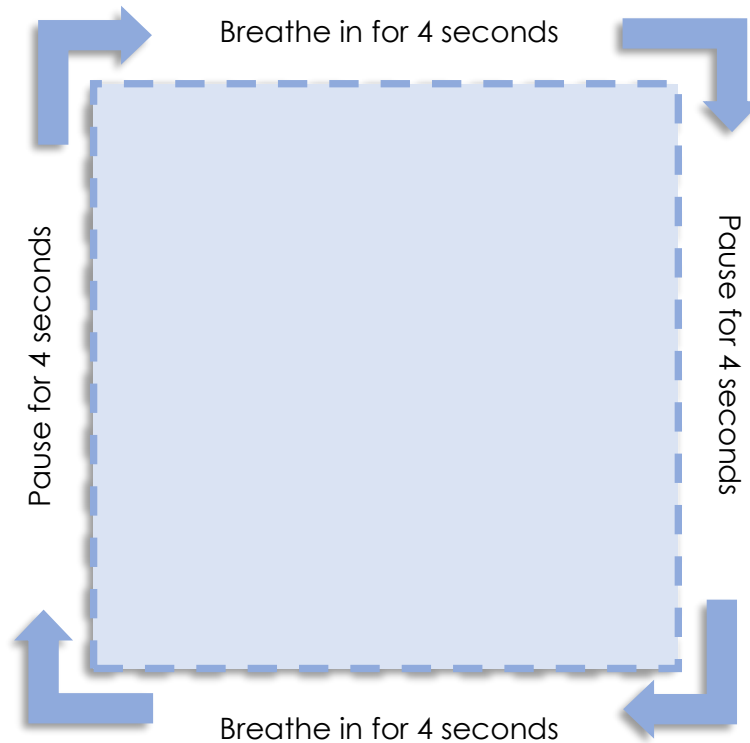
Once you are comfortable practicing Belly Breathing, imagine a balloon gently and evenly inflating in your rib cage with every inhalation. Then, imagine the balloon softly deflating as you exhale.

Breathe in through your nose, and when you exhale, try to pretend you are breathing out of a straw. This will help to slow down and even out your exhalation, which may help you get a better sense of the contraction of the pelvic floor and belly.



Exercise 3: Breathing Using a Square

1. Imagine a square, and starting at the bottom left corner, inhale and follow the arrow to the top left.



2. At the end of the in breath, pause, and follow the arrow to the top right. From there, exhale as you follow the arrow downwards to the bottom right corner. At the end of the out breath, pause again, and follow the arrow to the bottom left corner. Repeat this a few times.

3. This breathing exercise can be adapted to suit you, and so if the pauses feel uncomfortable, replace the square with a rectangle to reduce them.



Exercise 4: Alternate Nostril Breathing

The aim of this breathing exercise is to inhale through one nostril and exhale through the other, using your thumb and little finger to alternately close off the nostril.

Use your thumb to close off your right nostril and breathe in through your left nostril. Then, remove your thumb to open the right nostril and use your little finger to close your left nostril. Breathe out through the right nostril.

Now, inhale through the right nostril and out through the left, and repeat this several times.

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