

BREATHING EXERCISES *to* CALM YOUR MIND *and* BODY

When can we use breathing exercises?

- Before a test or performance
- To prepare for an awkward conversation
- To slow down a racing mind before bed
- To help increase focus and concentration while studying
- Anytime! The more you practise, the more helpful breathing exercises will be when you do need to use them.



Why do breathing exercises?

When you are anxious, you typically take short and shallow breaths with your upper chest, often without realizing it. This can make you feel even more anxious. Scientific studies have shown that breathing more slowly and deeply is one of the quickest ways to manage a stress response and calm the nerves.

How do they work?

Shallow, rapid breathing can cause dizziness, headaches, tingling extremities and a racing heart, and can make you feel more anxious. When you breathe slowly and deeply, more carbon dioxide stays in your blood, which quiets the emotional parts of your brain and helps you feel calmer. Focusing on your breathing (e.g., inhaling while slowly counting to four) can also be a mental distraction from a short-term intense or scary moment.

Breathing exercises are quick, portable, private—and, best of all, free!

GIVE IT A TRY!

There are lots of different breathing exercises you can do. Here are two types to try:



4-7-8 breathing

You can do this type of breathing anywhere and anytime: sitting on the bus, lying down on your bedroom floor, or before a quiz!

1. Put one hand on your belly and the other on your chest. (If you are in public, you can skip this part.)
2. Take a slow breath from your belly, silently counting to 4 as you breathe in. Expand your belly like you're blowing up a balloon.



3. Hold your breath and count from 1 to 7.
4. Breathe out steadily as you count from 1 to 8. Try to get all the air out of your lungs by the time you reach 8.
5. Repeat 5-10 times or until you feel calm. Notice how you feel at the end of the exercise.



Square breathing

Imagine or draw a square in the air when you are doing this exercise. Watch [Box Breathing](#) (Conscious Works, YouTube video, 1:03) or follow these steps:

1. Sit comfortably in a chair, with your feet on the floor and hands in your lap.
2. Inhale slowly through your nose for a count of 4, allowing the air to fill your belly.
3. Hold your breath for a count of 4.
4. Exhale slowly through your mouth for a count of 4.
5. Finally, hold your breath for a count of 4.
6. Repeat 5-10 times or until you feel calm. Notice how you feel at the end of the exercise.

More breathing resources

4-7-8 Breathing for Beginners (Hands-On Meditation)
YouTube video (4:02) with guided breathing audio for deep 4-7-8 breathing

Calm Bubble Breath (Calm)
YouTube video (0:52) that follows a relaxing stream in nature

GritX (website) or **iBreathe** (app)
Both allow you to customize the sounds and visuals of your calm breathing experience

Headspace Mini Meditation: Breathe (Headspace)
YouTube video (1:10) with guided instructions and a mesmerizing graphic

Mindshift CBT (Anxiety Canada)
Free app includes calm breathing audio tracks (you can customize the voice)

