



Neuro Café:
Breathing exercises for relaxation
25th May 2022

Anxiety

- The symptoms of an [anxiety attack](#) differ from one person to the next. Some common symptoms include:
 - Feeling tense, nervous, or fearful
 - [Hyperventilation](#), or rapid breathing
 - [Insomnia](#), or being unable to sleep
 - Restlessness or irritability
 - Sweating and/or trembling
 - Pins and needles
 - Worrying about the past or future
- Fight or flight response vs rest & digest system

How can anxiety affect my breathing?

- Quite often the symptoms of anxiety are very similar to those of breathlessness and it can be very difficult to distinguish between the two.
- It is therefore good to recognize how anxiety can affect you:
 - Being anxious can make you think less clearly.
 - This can make planning tasks and pacing yourself more difficult and so can increase breathlessness.
 - If you are anxious it is harder to spot the triggers that cause your breathlessness.
 - This makes you slower to use your coping techniques to help reduce your breathlessness.
 - Being anxious generally makes people more uptight or tense and can make the muscles around their chest feel tight.
 - This can increase breathlessness.
 - Anxiety can make someone focus more on their inability to breathe and 'get the air in', increasing breathlessness.
 - Being anxious makes your breathing faster and shallower and so can give the feeling of being more breathless.

Why is breathing important in relaxation?

- Hyperventilation accompanies most panic attacks. The body thinks it doesn't have enough oxygen when in reality hyperventilating means that the body is taking in TOO MUCH oxygen. This is why many people with anxiety feel light headed, dizzy, have chest pains, sweat more, feel tired and short of breath.
- By making sure you are breathing correctly it restores balance to your oxygen and carbon dioxide levels.



How do you breathe ?

- Put one hand on your chest.
 - Put the other just below your ribcage resting on your tummy.
 - Just let your hands rest there for a few moments while you take a few slow deep breaths.
 - Notice which hand moves the most.
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- **Your top hand moves the most:** You are a 'Chest Breather'. People who are tense and in pain often breathe using only the top part of their lungs and often tend to 'hold' the breath. This is not so good for relaxing and can be linked to muscle tension in the shoulders and neck and tightness in the chest.
 - **Your bottom hand moves the most:** You are a 'Belly Breather' or 'Diaphragm Breather'; This type of deep breathing is the best breathing pattern to give you pain and stress relief.

A Step-By-Step Guide to Diaphragmatic Breathing

Step 1

Sit or lie down in a comfortable position on a flat surface.



Step 2

Sit up straight and pull your shoulders back to relax them.



Step 3

Put one hand on your chest and one hand on your stomach.



Step 4

Breathe in through your nose for about two seconds.



Step 5

Purse your lips, press gently on your stomach, and exhale.



Step 6

Repeat these steps several times for the best results.



Breathing techniques

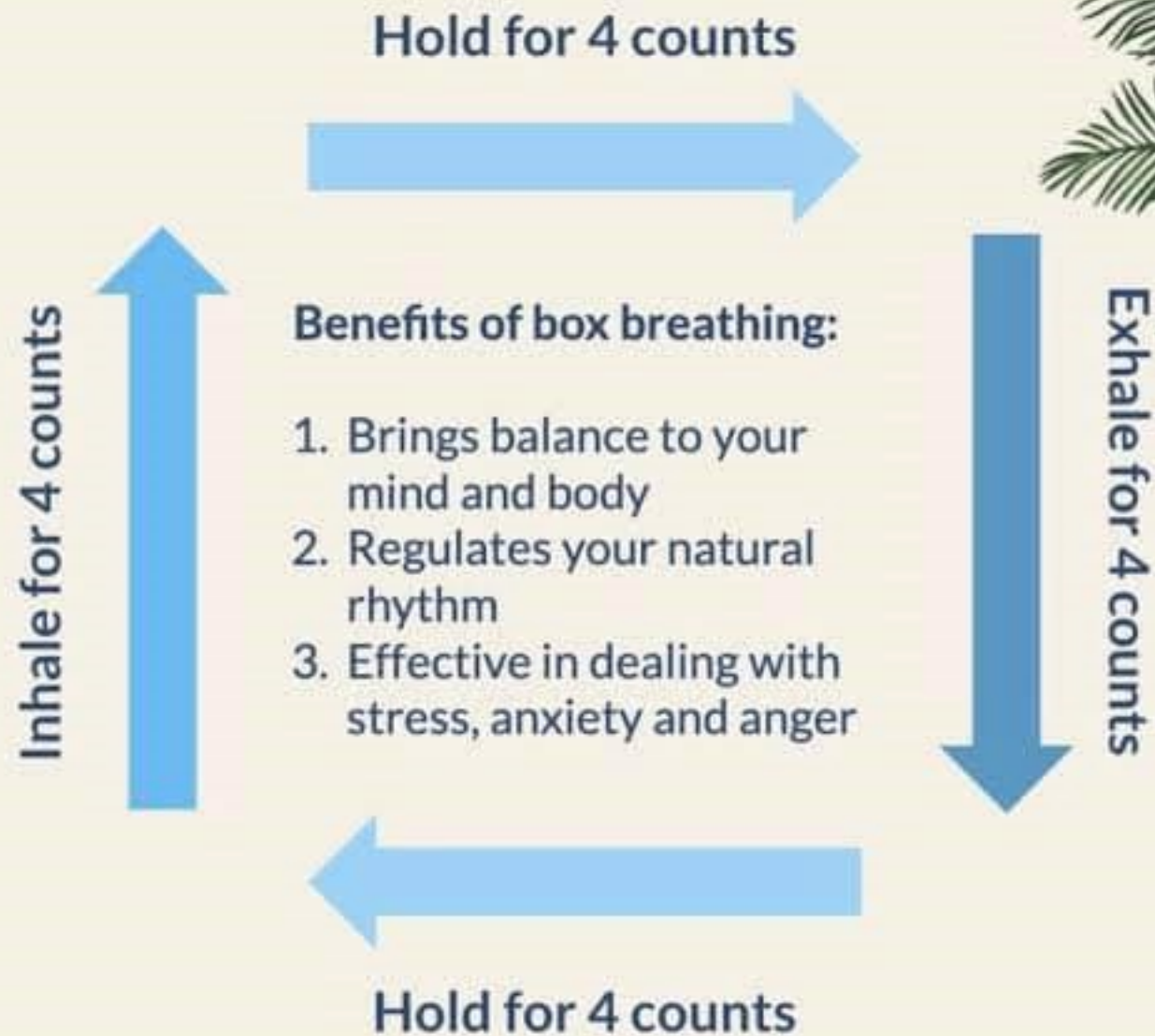
- Breathing techniques are often used to help people relax or deal with stress. They can be important because people who have [anxiety attacks](#) tend to take rapid, shallow breaths from the chest. This pattern may disrupt the oxygen and carbon dioxide levels that are typically kept in balance as people [breathe](#).
- Breathing exercises activate the body's "relaxation response." Relaxation changes the body's physical and emotional responses, reducing heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension
- STRENGTHEN the rest & digest system

**Don't be like
Mr Worry.**

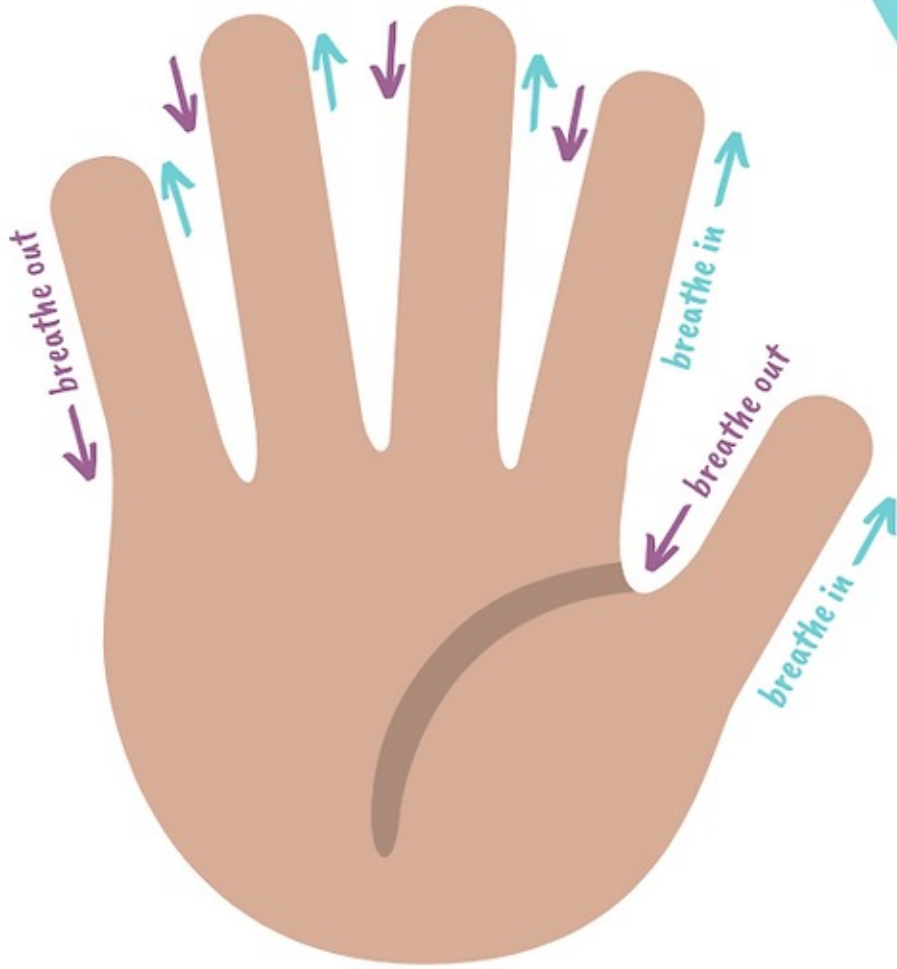


**Practise slow
breathing to
reduce your
anxiety
(and your
perma-frown).**

Box breathing



5 Finger Breathing



Stretch out one of your hands nice and wide.

Use your pointer finger from your other hand, to slowly trace your thumb from the bottom to the top, as you slowly breathe in through your nose.

When you get to the top of your thumb, slowly breathe out through your mouth, as you trace your pointer finger down the other side.

Keep going until you have traced your whole hand.



Calming hand : *A method to control panic attacks and breathlessness*

- The Calming Hand is used to help control panic attacks and eases breathlessness. It is a helpful tool to use when experiencing breathlessness, as you always have your hand with you.

1) Recognise: the signs of breathlessness/panic and that they are not sinister. Hold your thumb firmly whilst reminding yourself what to do next. This will help to calm your breathing.

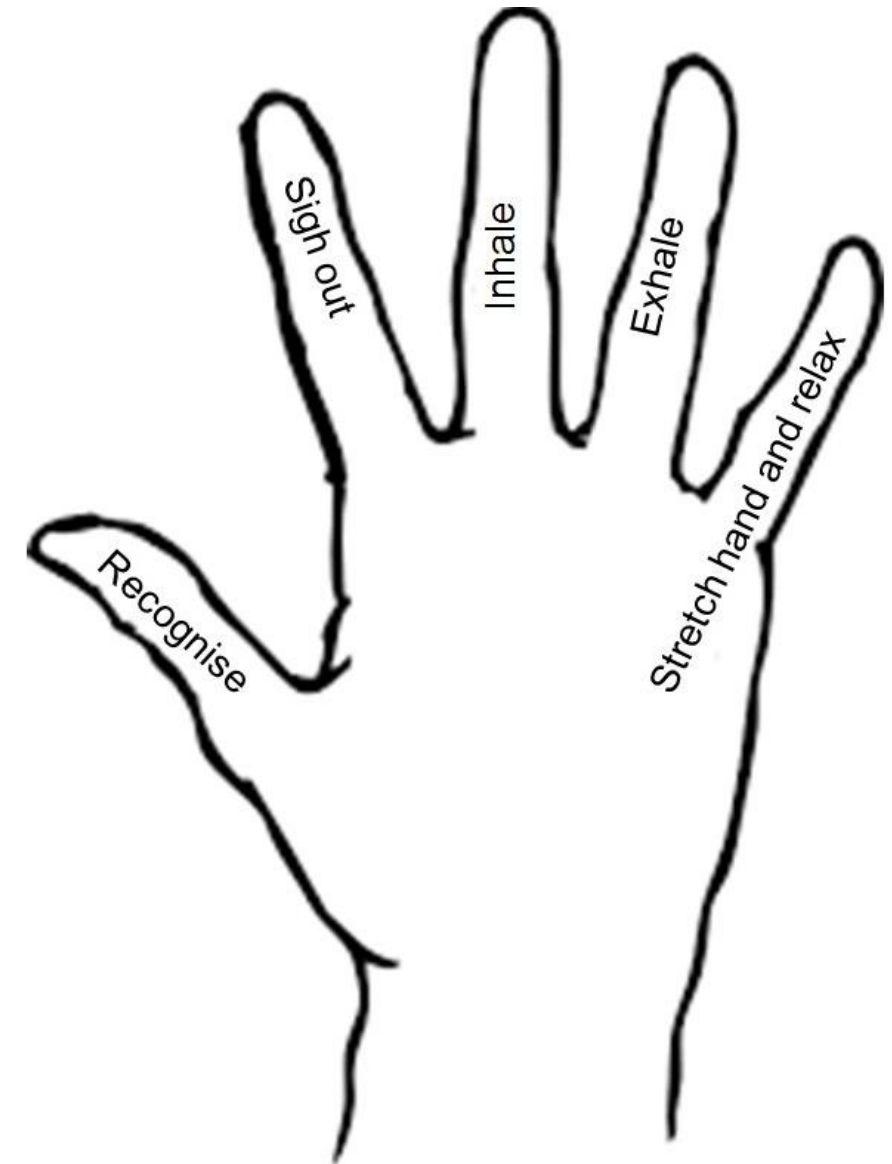
2) Sigh out - Relax your shoulders and breath out, stop and drop your shoulders.

3) Inhale : Take in a slow and gentle breath, through your nose, followed by ...

4) Exhale: ... a gentle breath out. Try and exhale for longer than you inhale.

5) Stretch your hand, relax and stop : hand stretching is helpful when having an acute episode of panic.

- Sometimes you may need to complete steps 1 to 5 again, sometimes it may take a while to settle.
- When you have completed the calming hand, try to practice some breathing control.





Breath focus

When deep breathing is focused and slow, it can help reduce anxiety. You can do this technique by sitting or lying down in a quiet, comfortable location.

Then:

- Notice how it feels when you inhale and exhale normally. Mentally scan your body. You might feel tension in your body that you never noticed.
 - Take a slow, deep breath through your nose.
 - Notice your belly and upper body expanding.
 - Exhale in whatever way is most comfortable for you, sighing if you wish.
 - Do this for several minutes, paying attention to the rise and fall of your belly.
 - Choose a word to focus on and vocalize during your exhale. Words like “safe” and “calm” can be effective.
 - Imagine your inhale washing over you like a gentle wave.
 - Imagine your exhale carrying negative and upsetting thoughts and energy away from you.
 - When you get distracted, gently bring your attention back to your breath and your words.
 - Practice this technique for up to 20 minutes daily when you can.
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“REGULATE
THE BREATHING,
AND
THEREBY
CONTROL
THE MIND.”

- B.K.S. IYENGAR
ITSALLYOUBOO.COM

4-7-8 Breathing

- This breathing technique is meant to make it easier to [fall asleep](#). It was designed by Dr. Andrew Weil, director of the Center for Integrative Medicine at the University of Arizona
- 4-7-8 exercise serves as a natural tranquilizer for the nervous system
- Sit up in chair back supported initially
 - Place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue behind your upper front teeth. You'll keep it there for the entire exercise.
 - Completely exhale through your mouth, making a "whoosh" sound.
 - Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose as you mentally count to four.
 - Hold your breath for a count of **seven**.
 - Exhale completely through your mouth, making another "whoosh" sound to a count of **eight**.



Relaxation for Walking

- Useful for social anxiety
- Breathe in for 3 steps
- Breathe out for 3 steps
- Relax for 3 steps
- Repeat as needed



“BREATHE
IN DEEPLY
TO BRING
YOUR
MIND HOME TO
YOUR BODY.”

- THICH NHAT HANH
ITSALLYOUBOO.COM

Benefits of slow deeper breathing

- **Reduced depression and anxiety.**
- **Improved sleep quality**
- **Reduced stress levels:** slow abdominal breathing can help reduce stress levels by slowing down your heart rate and lowering blood pressure. Additionally, it helps relax tense muscles and increase oxygen intake, both of which aid relaxation
- **Improved motor memory** - study showed improved motor memory in a group of 16 participants who practiced a 30-minute session of deep breathing
- **Meditative** – calms us down
- **Improves lung capacity** – health and fitness
- **Improved pain processing:** there is evidence that slow breathing can influence autonomic function and pain processing/perception





for anxiety & stress relief

DEEP BREATHING EXERCISE

**“THE
WISEST
ONE-WORD
SENTENCE?
BREATHE.”**

- TERRI GUILLEMETS
ITSALLYOUBOO.COM

**“TAKE A
DEEP BREATH.
INHALE PEACE.
EXHALE
HAPPINESS.”**

- A.D. POSEY
ITSALLYOUBOO.COM