

1. 5 Breathwork Techniques to Calm the Nervous System

Breathwork is a powerful, accessible tool to activate the parasympathetic nervous system—the body's "rest and digest" mode—helping to reduce stress, anxiety, and physical tension. These techniques slow and deepen breathing, counteracting the sympathetic "fight or flight" response, promoting relaxation and emotional balance.

Below are five well-researched breathwork methods, each with clear steps and benefits, suitable for daily practice or moments of acute stress.

1. Box Breathing (Square Breathing)

Pattern: Inhale for 4 seconds → Hold for 4 seconds → Exhale for 4 seconds → Hold for 4 seconds → Repeat.

Origin: Used by Navy SEALs and mindfulness practitioners to enhance focus and calm.

Benefits: Slows breathing rate, lowers heart rate, and improves concentration by anchoring attention to breath rhythm.

Practice tip: Visualise tracing the sides of a square as you breathe to maintain steady pacing.

Evidence: Recognised for activating the parasympathetic nervous system and reducing anxiety symptoms.

Inhale

4 seconds

Hold

4 seconds

Exhale

4 seconds

Hold

4 seconds

2. 4-7-8 Breathing



Inhale

Through the nose for 4 seconds



Hold

Breath for 7 seconds



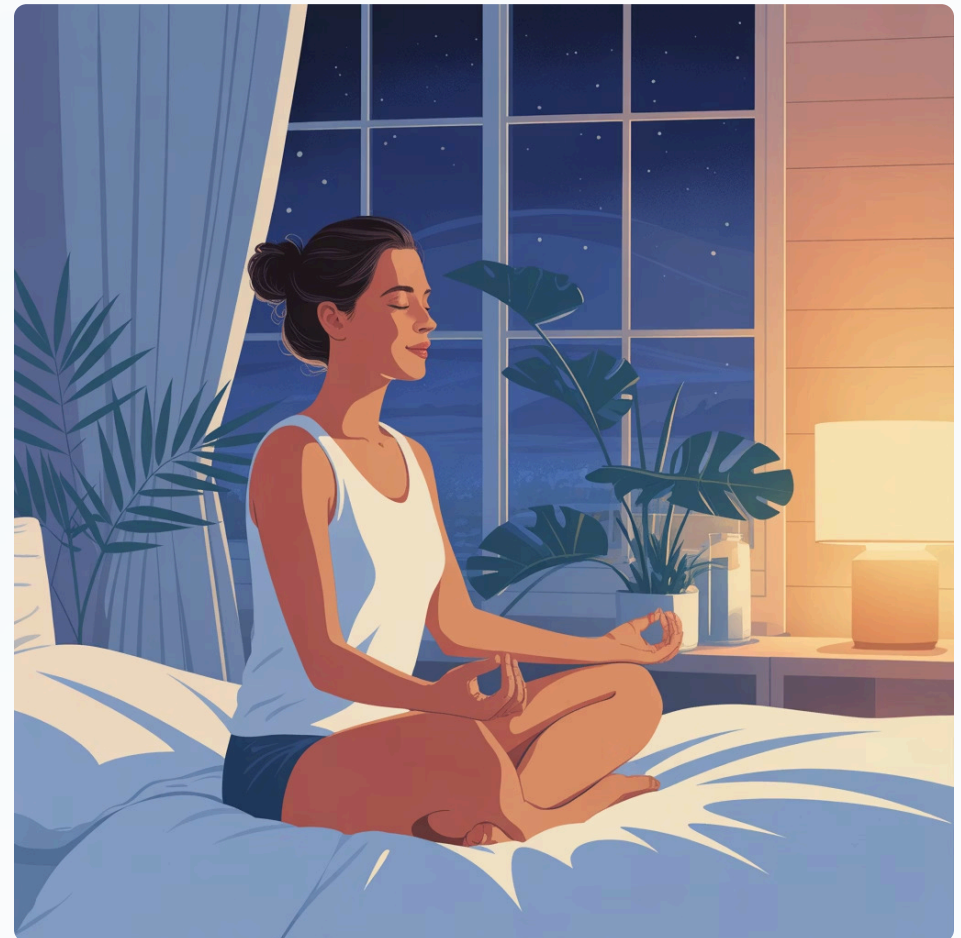
Exhale

Slowly through the mouth for 8 seconds

Popularised by Dr Andrew Weil, this technique is rooted in ancient yogic pranayama. Extending the exhale longer than the inhale signals the nervous system to relax, reducing stress and aiding sleep.

Practice tip: Keep the tongue gently touching the roof of the mouth behind the front teeth during the exercise.

Research shows it helps lower heart rate and blood pressure, facilitating a calm state.



3. 3-3-3 Breathing Technique

1

Breathe In

Deeply for 3 seconds

2

Hold


For 3 seconds

3

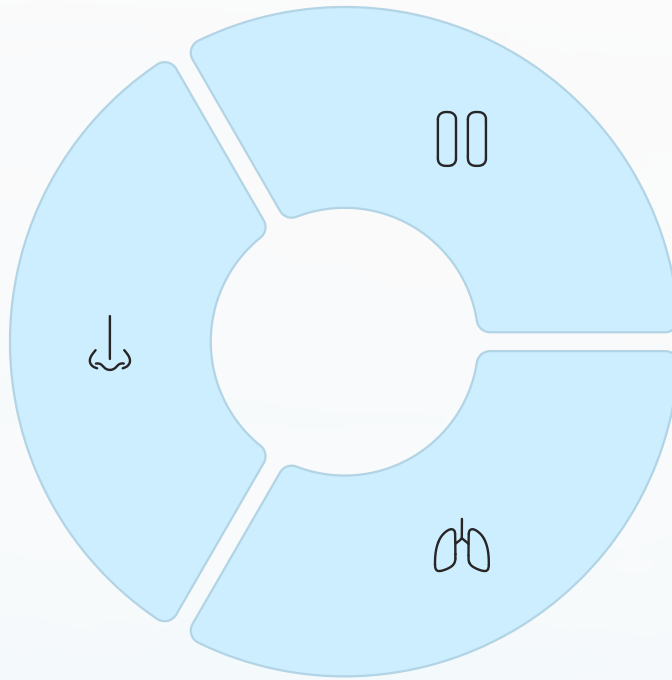
Exhale

Gently for 3 seconds

Simple and quick, this technique is ideal for immediate anxiety relief in any setting. It helps focus the mind on breath, slows heart rate, and interrupts anxious thought patterns.

 **Practice tip:** Use this technique during stressful moments like meetings or waiting in line. Recommended by mental health platforms for rapid calming effects.

4. Triangle (5-5-5) Breathing



Inhale

5 seconds



Hold

5 seconds



Exhale

5 seconds

Visualise breath moving along the sides of a triangle to maintain rhythm. This technique regulates blood pressure, reduces pain related to hypertension, and fosters emotional resilience.

Practice tip: Repeat for 5 minutes, focusing on the breath's flow and letting go of distracting thoughts.

Supported by clinical observations for balancing autonomic nervous system activity.

5. Diaphragmatic (Belly) Breathing

Technique

Breathe deeply into the belly so that the abdomen rises on the inhale and falls on the exhale. Focus on slow, gentle breaths through the nose and out through the mouth.

Benefits

Engages the vagus nerve, promoting parasympathetic activation and reducing muscle tension throughout the body.

Practice Tip

Place one hand on the belly to feel the movement and ensure full, deep breaths. Widely recommended by health services like the NHS for stress and panic management.

Conclusion: Integrating Breathwork for Nervous System Health



Regular Practice

Train your nervous system to better manage stress and anxiety through consistent breathwork. Start with just a few minutes daily, gradually increasing duration as comfort grows.



Accessible Tool

Breathwork is a safe, cost-free, and effective self-regulation tool that empowers you to restore calm anytime, anywhere.



Holistic Approach

For best results, combine breathwork with mindful awareness and a supportive environment to maximise benefits.



Important: Remember to consult a healthcare professional if you have respiratory or cardiovascular conditions before starting new breath practices.

References & Further Resources

Explore these trusted sources for guided sessions and deeper understanding of breathwork's impact on nervous system health:

Harvard Health Publishing

The Science of Breathing for Stress Relief (2024)

NHS.uk

Breathing Exercises for Stress (2022)

Cabin Creek Health

Triangle 5-5-5 Breathing Guide

Shift Collab

Breathwork for Nervous System Regulation (2023)

Cleveland Clinic

How to Do 4-7-8 Breathing (2022)

BetterUp

Parasympathetic Breathing Exercises (2023)

Find more free resources on our website www.ically.life