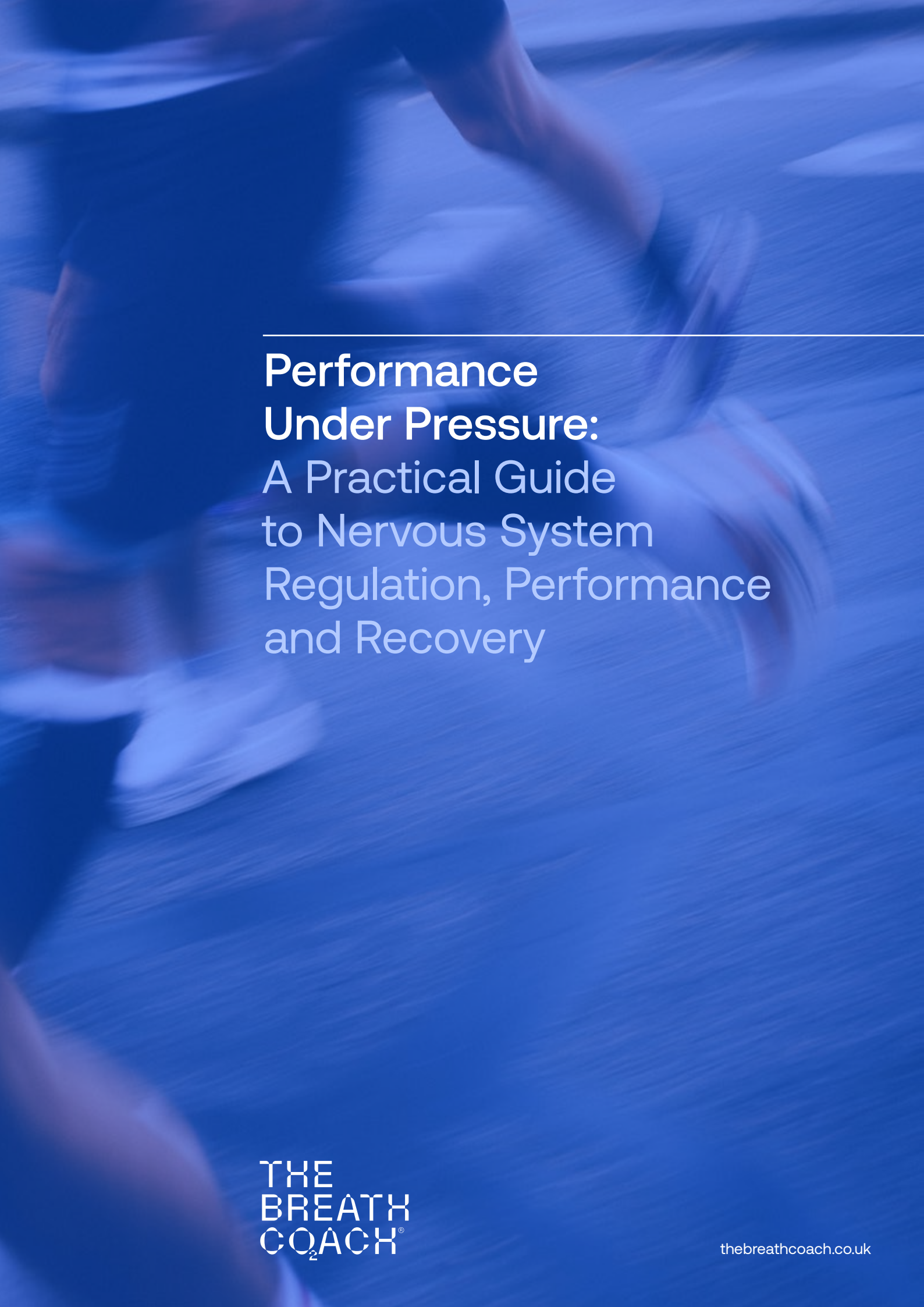

Performance Under Pressure:

A Practical Guide to Nervous System Regulation, Performance and Recovery

THE BREATH COACH®

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At The Breath Coach, we believe proper breathing is the most critical yet overlooked component of physical and mental fitness. Let’s change that.

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Welcome

This guide is designed to help you take small, science-backed steps towards calmer nervous system regulation, stronger physical performance, better emotional resilience and recovery.

Inside, you'll learn a handful of simple breathing techniques that can help improve focus, recovery, resilience, sleep and performance under pressure.

Whether you're a coach, athlete, business leader or simply someone looking to perform better in daily life, these practices can be integrated into your routine in just a few minutes per day.

Start small. Stay consistent.

Performance starts with simple changes to breathing.

01

Technique 1a:
Breathing Awareness & Testing

Your breathing rate is one of the simplest and most powerful indicators of nervous system balance, respiratory efficiency and overall health.

Most people pay attention to heart rate, sleep and recovery, yet rarely consider how they breathe. The way you breathe influences your physiology, your ability to manage stress and your capacity to perform under pressure. Before changing anything, we first need to understand your starting point.

- Sit or lie quietly and breathe naturally for 1 minute.
- Count how many breaths you take.
- 1 breath = 1 inhale and 1 exhale.

Important: Breathe naturally.
Do not consciously slow your breathing down.

As you observe your breathing, simply notice:
— Where you feel the breath.
— Whether your breathing feels calm or rushed.
— Whether you breathe through your nose or mouth.

An optimal breathing rate at rest is typically between 6 and 12 breaths per minute. Lower breathing rates are generally associated with greater efficiency, improved recovery and better nervous system regulation.

Higher breathing rates can reflect increased sympathetic activity (stress), poor breathing efficiency or underlying tension. Research suggests that approximately 6 breaths per minute may represent an optimal breathing cadence for nervous system regulation and cardiovascular function.

Technique 1b:
CO_2 Tolerance Score

CO_2 Tolerance Score

Another useful measure of breathing health is your CO_2 Tolerance Score.

- Goal: 40+ seconds
- Why it matters: Higher carbon dioxide tolerance is associated with better focus, deeper sleep, stronger stress resilience, improved energy, and enhanced physical and mental performance.

How to measure your CO_2 Tolerance Score:

1. Sit comfortably and breathe calmly through your nose for a few minutes.
2. Get a timer ready.
3. Inhale gently through your nose, then exhale gently through your nose.
4. After the exhale, pinch your nose and hold your breath. Start a timer.
5. Hold your breath until you feel the first distinct urge to breathe. This might feel like a tightening of the throat, a diaphragm twitch or a strong mental or physical urge to breathe.
6. Release your nose, stop the timer, and resume normal nasal breathing.

Your time in seconds is your CO_2 Tolerance Score.
Aim to test it daily, ideally first thing in the morning for the most accurate results. Remember, this is a test, not a practice. It often takes several attempts to become familiar with the subjective feeling of the first genuine urge to breathe.

Technique 1c:
Understanding Your Results

Understanding Your Results

A lower breathing rate and a higher CO_2 Tolerance Score are often associated with better breathing efficiency, improved recovery, stronger resilience to stress and anxiety, greater focus, improved sleep and increased performance.

If your breathing rate or BOLT Score are outside the optimal range, it is a clear sign your body is under unnecessary strain.

The good news is that you can train it. Improving your breathing chemistry and carbon dioxide tolerance is one of the fastest and most effective ways to unlock better sleep, stronger performance, and greater emotional balance.

If you would like to understand how to improve your breathing rate, CO_2 Tolerance Score, and overall nervous system regulation, enquire about personalised support by booking a free consultation.

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Technique 2:
The Two Minute Reset

Calm yourself up.

Breathing is a direct and voluntary way to influence the autonomic nervous system.

- Set a timer for 2 minutes.
- Breathe in slowly through your nose for 3 to 5 sec.
- Breathe out slowly through your nose for 3 to 5 secs.

Choose a rhythm that feels sustainable without strain.

Breathing lightly, slowly and deeply reduces sympathetic activation (stress), increases parasympathetic activity (calm) and promotes emotional and physiological regulation.

If you can hear yourself breathing, you are likely breathing too forcefully. Aim for silent, relaxed nasal airflow.

2 minutes of focused breathing can begin shifting your physiological state toward calm, recovery, and balance.

03

Technique 3:
Breathing In Motion

Optimise every day.

Tidal breathing refers to the natural, effortless flow of inhalation and exhalation that occurs when breathing is calm, efficient, and well regulated. It is the foundation of healthy breathing and the pattern we should aim to return to throughout the day.

This technique builds upon the breathing rhythm introduced in the previous exercise, helping you apply those same principles during everyday activities and periods of light movement.

- During a walk, commute, light movement or exercise, breathe through your nose.
- Allow the diaphragm and lower ribs to move laterally naturally with each breath.
- Maintain a comfortable breathing rhythm of 3/3, 4/4, or 5/5 depending on your current ability.
- Keep the breath quiet, relaxed, and rhythmic in time with your steps or movement.
- Slow down if breathing becomes heavy and you want to begin mouth breathing.

Practising nasal tidal breathing during everyday activities helps reinforce healthy breathing habits, improve respiratory efficiency and CO_2 tolerance, and build awareness of how you breathe under different levels of physical and mental demand.

The goal is to challenge but not to stress. A mild feeling of air hunger is normal. Stay relaxed, stay controlled, and allow adaptation to occur gradually over time.

04

Technique 4:
Extend Your Exhale

Extend your exhale. Shift your state.

The exhale phase plays a critical role in activating the parasympathetic nervous system through stimulation of the vagus nerve.

This supports relaxation, improves heart rate variability (HRV), and promotes recovery and emotional regulation.

- Breathe in through your nose for 4 seconds.
- Breathe out through your nose for 6 seconds.
- If this feels challenging, adjust to a 3 second inhale and a 5 second exhale.

Extending the exhale increases vagal tone, helping the body move from a sympathetic, high-alert state toward rest, repair, and resilience.

Use this technique during stillness, post-exercise recovery, work breaks, or as part of a pre-sleep routine.

A slight feeling of challenge is normal when extending the exhale.

Stay relaxed, stay controlled and allow your breathing system to adapt over time.

05

Technique 5:
Light, Slow, Deep (LSD) Breathing with Humming

You don’t have to be a zen master to breathe like one.

- Breathe through your nose with minimal effort, keeping the airflow light, slow, and diaphragmatic.
- Incorporate a gentle hum during your exhale.

Humming significantly increases nitric oxide levels in the nasal passages, which improves oxygen delivery, supports vasodilation, enhances circulation, boosts airway function, and helps regulate the nervous system.

Nitric oxide also plays a role in maintaining healthy blood flow and supporting immune and autonomic nervous system function.

Maintain a steady, relaxed hum to extend the exhale without strain. If needed, reduce breath volume to stay comfortable and light.

Light, Slow, Deep breathing with humming reinforces respiratory efficiency, strengthens autonomic regulation, and builds a foundation for improved health, resilience, and performance.

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Bonus:
Your First Seven Days

Building better breathing habits begins with small, consistent actions. These simple daily practices reinforce respiratory efficiency, improve nervous system regulation, and support long-term resilience.

Day 1	**Complete the Breathing Awareness and Testing.** Observe your natural breathing without altering it. Record your resting breathing rate and CO_2 Tolerance Score.
Day 2	**Practice the Two Minute Reset.** Focus on nasal breathing with a calm rhythm of 3 to 5 seconds in and out. Ideal times are after waking or before bed.
Day 3	**Integrate Tidal Breathing into a walk, commute or period of quiet movement.** Focus on smooth, even nasal breathing with light diaphragmatic movement.
Day 4	**Use the Extended Exhale practice before sleep.** Breathe in for 4 seconds, breathe out for 6 seconds for 5 minutes to promote vagal activation and prepare the body for recovery.
Day 5	**Choose your preferred technique and use it today.** Use your chosen technique at different points throughout the day and notice how it influences your breathing, focus, and state.
Day 6	**Combine Tidal Breathing and an Extended Exhale during a work break.** Shift your state, regulate your nervous system, and support better focus and recovery.
Day 7	**Explore nasal breathing during exercise.** During your next exercise session, maintain nasal breathing and gradually increase the intensity. Notice the point where nasal breathing becomes challenging and use it as a guide for your current fitness and breathing efficiency.

Performance Under Pressure Starts Here.

07

Ready to Go Deeper?
Performance Starts with Breathing

Breathwork isn't work. It's freedom.

The way you breathe influences how you think, feel, move, perform and recover.

Small improvements in breathing can create meaningful changes in focus, resilience, recovery and performance under pressure.

This guide is only the beginning.

At The Breath Coach, we help athletes, coaches, teams and organisations develop better breathing habits through assessment, education and personalised training. If you'd like to explore what better breathing could do for your health, wellbeing or performance, we'd love to hear from you.

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Book a free consultation and discover where your breathing may be holding you back.

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