

BOX BREATHING FOR ANXIETY

A paced-breathing activity you can adapt to your own body

Box breathing uses four equal parts: breathe in, pause, breathe out, pause. The familiar pattern is a count of four for each side of the 'box'. The count is a guide, not a target. If four feels uncomfortable, use a shorter count or skip the holds.

1 — BREATHE IN

Breathe in gently through your nose if comfortable. Count slowly: 1 — 2 — 3 — 4.

2 — PAUSE

Pause gently. Do not strain or clamp your breath. 1 — 2 — 3 — 4.

3 — BREATHE OUT

Let the breath leave slowly and comfortably. 1 — 2 — 3 — 4.

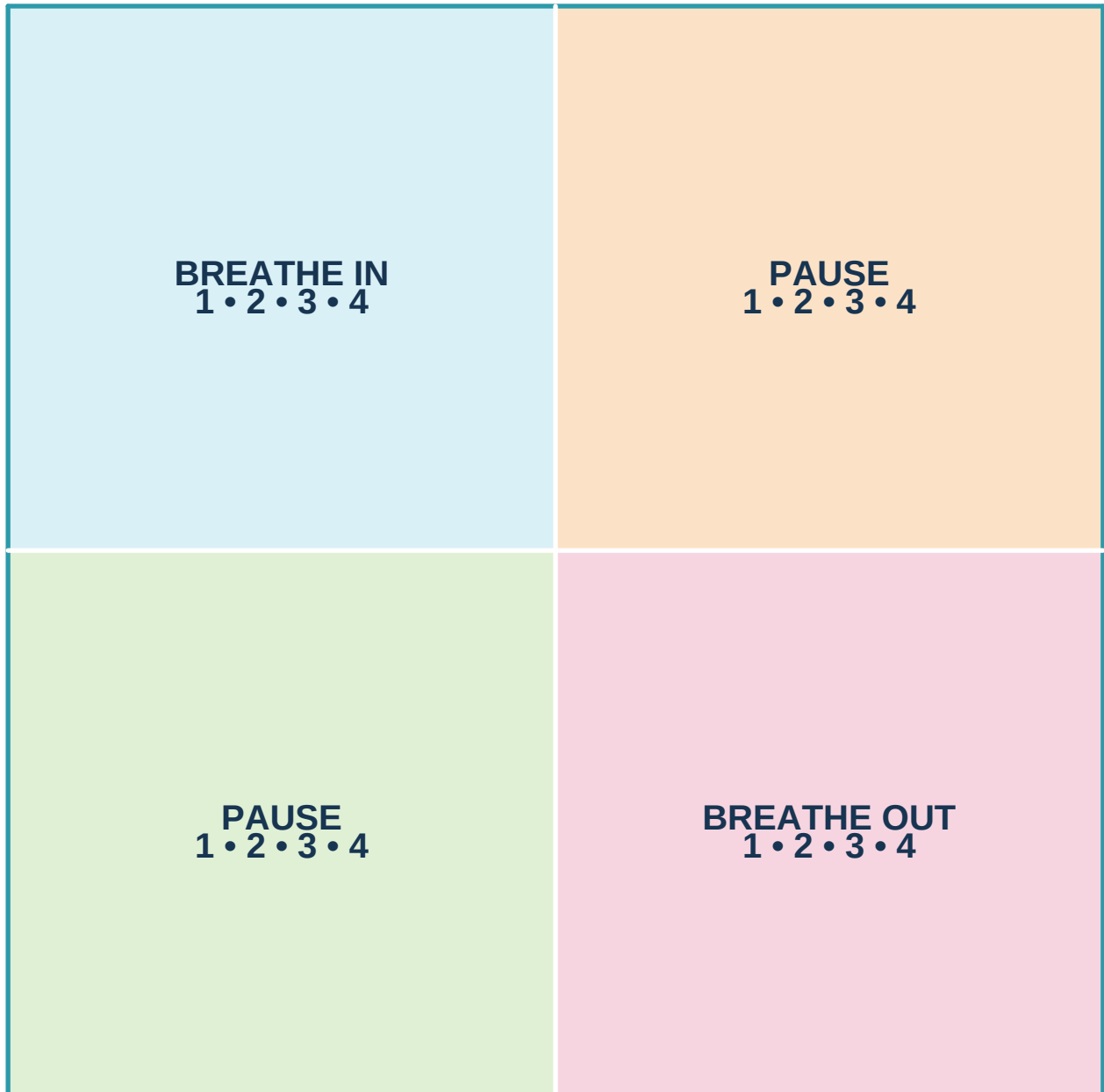
4 — PAUSE

Rest briefly before the next breath. If an empty-lung pause feels unpleasant, leave it out.

Important: Breathing exercises do not suit everyone. Stop if you become dizzy, light-headed, more panicky or physically uncomfortable. Ordinary, unforced breathing is always an option.

TRACE THE BOX

Use your finger, a pen, or just your eyes. Follow one side for each part of the breath.



Try one round first. Notice whether the rhythm feels steady, neutral, uncomfortable or calming. You decide whether to continue.

FIND YOUR COMFORTABLE COUNT

There is nothing special about reaching four. The useful pace is the one you can do without strain.

TRY A COUNT OF 2

In 1–2 • pause 1–2 • out 1–2 • pause 1–2

How did that feel? _____

TRY A COUNT OF 3

In 1–2–3 • pause 1–2–3 • out 1–2–3 • pause 1–2–3

How did that feel? _____

TRY A COUNT OF 4

In 1–2–3–4 • pause • out • pause

How did that feel? _____

My most comfortable count today: _____

Would I rather remove the breath holds? Yes / No / Sometimes

What did I notice in my body?

BOX BREATHING WITHOUT COUNTING

Counting can become another task to get 'right'. Try a visual version instead.

SIDE 1 — IN

Imagine drawing the first side of a square while breathing in gently.

SIDE 2 — REST

Draw the top of the square while resting briefly.

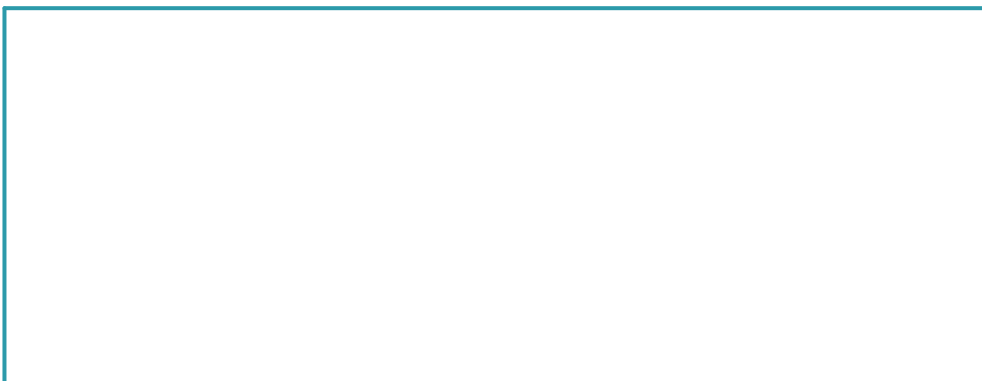
SIDE 3 — OUT

Draw the next side while letting the breath leave.

SIDE 4 — REST

Complete the square with a comfortable pause — or simply begin the next natural breath.

Draw your own breathing square below. Make the sides as long or short as feels comfortable.



WHEN PANIC MAKES BREATHING HARD

You do not have to take a 'big deep breath'. For some people that can feel worse.

MAKE IT SMALLER

Let the breath stay gentle. A quiet, ordinary breath can be easier than trying to fill your lungs.

DROP THE HOLDS

Use only two sides: breathe in comfortably, then breathe out comfortably. Repeat without pauses.

PAIR IT WITH GROUNDING

Look at one object, feel your feet on the floor, or touch a textured object while you breathe.

STOP IF IT IS MAKING THINGS WORSE

Switch to another grounding activity. A technique is a choice, not something you have to push through.

The alternative that works best for me:

MY PERSONAL BREATHING PLAN

Complete this when you are relatively settled, so you have a simple plan to return to.

MY COMFORTABLE RHYTHM

I prefer a count of _____ / no counting / another rhythm: _____

BREATH HOLDS

I prefer: both holds / one hold / no holds / it depends

WHAT HELPS ME STAY GROUNDED

Feet on floor / looking at an object / tracing a square / holding something / other:

SIGNS I SHOULD STOP

WHAT I WILL TRY INSTEAD

Breathing exercises can be useful for some people, but they are not a substitute for medical assessment or urgent support. New or severe breathlessness, chest pain, fainting, or other concerning physical symptoms should not automatically be assumed to be anxiety.

AFTER THE EXERCISE

Notice what happened without judging whether you did it 'properly'.

Before I started, the intensity felt: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Afterwards, the intensity feels: 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

WHAT FELT HELPFUL?

WHAT FELT UNCOMFORTABLE?

WHAT WILL I REMEMBER NEXT TIME?

My reminder: I can adapt the technique. I do not need to force my breathing, hold my breath, or finish a set number of rounds.