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Paced Breathing for Relaxation

You can use your breath to regulate your nervous system. Contemplative practices have used this for centuries to calm the body and mind. The military and police also use breathing (referred to as tactical, paced or box breathing) to maintain optimal functioning in high-risk situation.

The basic technique is to slow your breathing to around 6 breaths per minute with a 4/6 ratio of inhalation to exhalation time. Breathing in this manner has been found to promote a harmonious state between your respiration and your heart.

- Begin by turning your attention to your breathing, feeling your chest rise and fall and noticing the sensations of air moving in and out of your nostrils.
- Inhale for 4 seconds, breathing deeply so that your abdomen expands as if it was inflating like a balloon.
- Exhale for 6 seconds, slowing the flow of air by pursing your lips and making a swoosh sound.
 - *You may need to start with a shorter inhale to exhale ratio, for example 2/4 or 3/5, and work up to 4/6. Each person has to find the combination that works for them.*
- If your mind wanders, gently redirect your focus back to the counting and breathing.
- Using a breathing app in the beginning can help serve as a breathing coach. Eventually, the paced breathing will become second nature.
- Start practicing with a couple of minutes of paced breathing two times a day, during times when you feel stressed, or before situations that you anticipate will cause stress.
- If you start to feel dizzy or experience tingling sensations, try breathing a little less deeply or shorten your breath cycle.

Articles and Videos:

- *The Science of Slow Deep Breathing.* Matthew MacKinnon MD. Breathwork-Science. Jan 12, 2018. <https://breathwork-science.org/2018/01/12/the-science-of-slow-deep-breathing/>
- *The Breathing Technique for Calm: Tips from a Navy Seal.* Time Motto. May 4, 2016. <http://time.com/4316151/breathing-technique-navy-seal-calm-focused/>
- “Soldiers Use this Breathing Technique to Stay Calm” Belisa Vranich, Ph.D. Author of “Breathe” Nov 2016 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AO4jlpw0Rk>
- “How to Breathe” Belisa Vranich, Ph.D. Tedx Manhattan Beach. Dec 2, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1sgb2cUqFiY>

Apps:

- Breathe2Relax, *iOS and Android* <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/breathe2relax/id425720246?mt=8> , <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=org.t2health.breathe2relax>
- Paced Breathing, *Android* <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.apps.paced.breathing&hl=en>
- Breath+ Simple Breath Trainer, *iOS:* <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/breathe-simple-breath-trainer/id1106998959?mt=8>
- Biobreathing: *iOS* <http://biobreathing.appstor.io/>
- Tactical Breather (uses box breathing, inhale, hold, exhale, hold – 4 seconds each): <https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/tactical-breather/id445893881?mt=8>; <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=t2.tacticalBreather>