

Navy SEAL Box Breathing Quick Guide

What It Is

Box breathing (also called tactical breathing) is a simple breathing technique used by Navy SEALs to calm their nervous system and regain focus under extreme stress. It takes 2-3 minutes and can be done anywhere.

The 4×4 Pattern

Step 1: Inhale for 4 seconds

Step 2: Hold for 4 seconds

Step 3: Exhale for 4 seconds

Step 4: Hold for 4 seconds

Repeat for 4-6 complete cycles (2-3 minutes total).

How to Do It

1. **Find a comfortable position** - sitting or standing, shoulders relaxed
2. **Start with a complete exhale** - empty your lungs completely
3. **Begin the cycle:**
 - Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 counts
 - Hold your breath for 4 counts (don't strain)
 - Exhale slowly through your mouth for 4 counts
 - Hold empty for 4 counts
4. **Repeat 4-6 times** until you feel your heart rate slow

When to Use It

- Before high-stress situations (presentations, difficult conversations, etc.)
- When you catch yourself spiraling or overthinking
- After identifying what you can't control (helps shift from panic to action mode)
- First thing in the morning or before bed
- Anytime you feel your threat-detection system taking over

Why It Works

Box breathing activates your parasympathetic nervous system—your body's "rest and digest" mode. This literally tells your brain to stop scanning for threats and return to normal function. It's not meditation or mindfulness—it's basic biology.

Tips

- Count slowly and steadily (1-Mississippi, 2-Mississippi...)
- Don't force it—if 4 seconds feels too long, try 3
- Focus only on the counting, not on trying to "relax"
- Use it as a bridge between identifying stress and taking action