

Deep Breathing to Help Manage Stress



A diagnosis of neuroendocrine cancer can bring feelings of stress, uncertainty and emotional distress. These responses are common and can affect both emotional and physical wellbeing.

When we experience stress, the body's "fight, flight or freeze" response is activated.

This natural response can cause changes such as faster or shallower breathing, muscle tension, increased sweating, a racing heart, and difficulty thinking clearly or making decisions. While these reactions are designed to help us respond to immediate threats, they can become unhelpful when stress persists, contributing to ongoing feelings of anxiety and physical discomfort.

Our breathing is closely connected to the nervous system and by slowing and deepening our breathing, we can encourage the body's natural relaxation response and help reduce the physical symptoms of stress.



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Learning to recognise your body's signals and respond with simple, practical strategies can help you feel more in control.

Deep breathing, cyclic sighing and box breathing are evidence-informed breathing techniques that may help calm the nervous system, improve focus and promote relaxation.

Although it will not remove the source of stress, it can help you feel better equipped to respond to and manage challenging situations.



SAFETY FIRST



If you have a health condition that prevents or restricts the use of deep breathing techniques, consult with your healthcare professional to explore alternate exercises or techniques that can help you relax.



If you feel dizzy, light-headed, or short of breath, return to your normal breathing and stop the exercise. Practise only within your comfort level.



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How to practice deep breathing

Choose a comfortable position, either sitting or lying down. If you feel comfortable doing so, gently close your eyes.

As you learn the technique, place one hand on your stomach. As you breathe in, you should notice your tummy rise gently beneath your hand, while your shoulders remain relatively relaxed and still.

1



Inhale

Breathe in slowly through your nose for approximately **4 seconds**.

2



Pause

Hold your breath comfortably for approximately **4 seconds**.

3



Exhale

Breathe out slowly through your mouth for approximately **6 seconds**.
The exhale is slightly longer than the inhale.

4



REPEAT

These timings are intended as a guide only. If they feel uncomfortable, adjust the length of each breath to a pace that feels natural. The goal is slow, comfortable breathing rather than forcing your breath.



Repeat this cycle for **2 minutes** each day. As the technique becomes more familiar, gradually increase your practice to **5 to 10 minutes** each day.

Regular practice makes it easier to use the technique when you are feeling stressed or overwhelmed.



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How to practice cyclic sighing

Cyclic sighing is a breathing technique that builds on deep breathing by adding a second, shorter inhale before a slow exhale.

This pattern mimics the body's natural sigh reflex and may help reduce stress, promote relaxation, and improve mood.

- 1 Inhale:** Breathe in slowly through your nose until your lungs feel about halfway full.
- 2 Pause:** Hold your breath briefly, only for as long as feels comfortable.
- 3 Inhale again:** Take a second, shorter breath in through your nose to gently fill your lungs completely.
- 4 Exhale:** Breathe out slowly and fully through your mouth.



Repeat for
up to
5 minutes
or for as long
as feels
comfortable.



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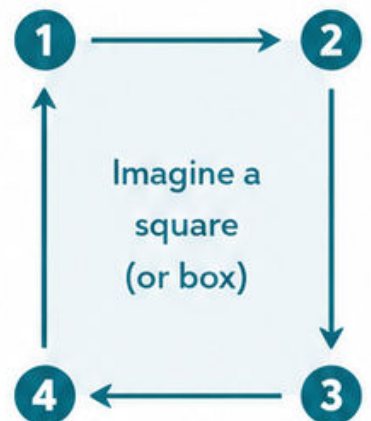
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How to practice box breathing

Box breathing is a simple breathing exercise that combines slow, steady breathing with the visual image of tracing the four sides of a square (or box).

You can imagine the square with your eyes closed or trace it with your eyes open as you breathe.

- 1 Inhale:** Breathe in slowly through your nose for 4 seconds.
- 2 Pause:** Hold your breath comfortably for 4 seconds.
- 3 Exhale:** Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 4 seconds.
- 4 Pause:** Pause comfortably with your lungs empty for 4 seconds.



Repeat:

Continue this cycle for 5 to 10 minutes, maintaining a slow, relaxed breathing pattern.



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Tips for success

-  A common mistake when learning deep breathing is breathing too quickly.
-  Counting each inhale, pause and exhale in your mind can help you maintain a slow, steady rhythm. Counting also helps gently redirect your attention away from stressful thoughts and towards the present moment.
-  If your mind wanders, simply acknowledge it and return your focus to your breathing and counting.
-  Like any new skill, deep breathing becomes easier with regular practice.
-  Over time, many people find it develops into a valuable, lifelong strategy for managing stress and supporting emotional wellbeing throughout their cancer experience and beyond.



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