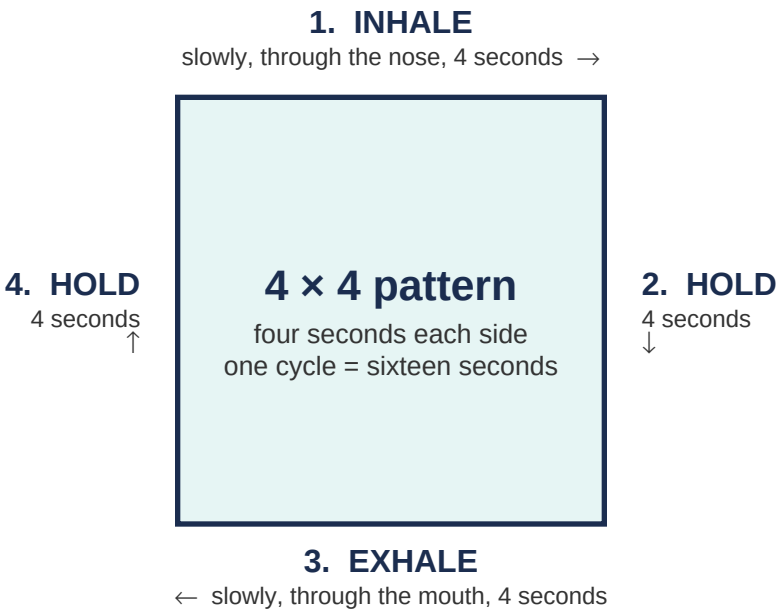
Box Breathing

A four-step breath pattern for slowing your nervous system down.

When your body is on alert, the breath is one of the few things you can change deliberately. Slow, even breathing with breath holds tells the nervous system that it is safe to wind down. Two to five minutes is enough to shift the gear.



Why this works

The long exhale and the breath holds activate the parasympathetic nervous system, the wind-down side of your autonomic system. Heart rate slows. Heart rate variability rises. The body gets the signal that it is safe to come off alert. This is the most-studied breath technique outside of paced breathing; Navy SEALs use it before high-stress decisions, anaesthesiologists before procedures. You can use it before a hard conversation, before bed, or in the middle of the day when your shoulders are up around your ears.

When to use it

- Right before something hard (a meeting, a phone call, a decision)
- When you notice your shoulders are up or your jaw is tight
- Five minutes before bed
- Anywhere you can sit quietly for two minutes

When in your day could you add two minutes of this

Naming a specific moment makes it more likely to happen than a vague intention.

Book a free 15-minute consult

A free, 15-minute call with Sean, a Canadian Certified Counsellor. No pressure, just a conversation.

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Educational content; not a substitute for therapy. If you are working through something significant, consider connecting with a counsellor or your family doctor.