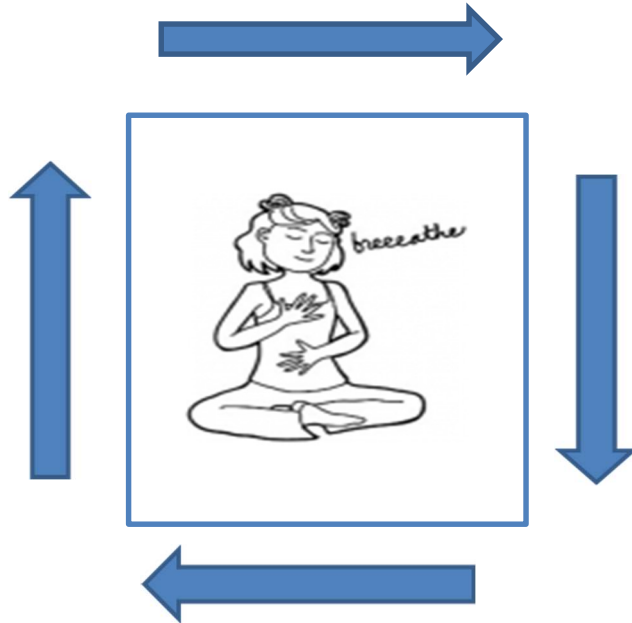


SQUARE BREATHING

This is a simple mindful breathing exercise that helps you focus on breathing to create calm and lower anxiety levels.



Paying attention to your breathing is one of the best ways to relieve anxiety and stress. This exercise regulates the breath and heart rate calms the nervous system lowering feelings of tension and reducing panic. It helps you feel more grounded and calm in both your mind and body.

To do “square breathing”

Sit comfortably with your spine straight, shoulders relaxed and with your legs and arms uncrossed. Alternatively you can lie on your back with cushions where you need support. Close your eyes and begin to notice yourself breathing in and out without forcing your breathing.

Before you try square breathing, take a few slightly longer breaths, focusing on filling the bottom of your lungs with air. If you’re struggling with this, place a hand just at the bottom of your ribcage – you should feel it going up and down.

NOW IMAGINE A SQUARE SHAPE IN YOUR MIND

The square can be any colour you like, it can glow, sparkle or change colour – whatever works for you. In your mind, travel round the square shape clockwise, starting from the top left:-

- Breathe in as you count to 2 or 3
- Hold your breath at the corner for 1 or 2 breaths. Try to do this in an open, relaxed way rather than tensing.
- Breathe out slowly down the side of the square. If you can, extend the breath to 4 or 5 as you breathe out.
- Pause at the corner and hold your breath again for 1 or 2 breaths.
- Breathe in to the count of 2 or 3 along the bottom of the square.
- Pause at the corner and hold your breath again for 1 or 2 breaths.
- Breathe out to the count of 4 or 5 up the square to return to where you started.
- Repeat at least 4 times travelling round the square in the same way.

If it is too hard to deliberately extend the breathing round the square, breathe naturally then lengthen the breath when it is more comfortable. Do not hold your breath longer than it feels comfortable. You will find that your breath naturally deepens with practice so it does not need to be forced. If you find your attention wandering, just notice this and bring your awareness back to the breath and the square. As you progress you can go round the square without needing to count.

Health warning: If you suffer from asthma or other breathing difficulties, please consult with your doctor before undertaking any breathing exercises.