



Mindful Breathing

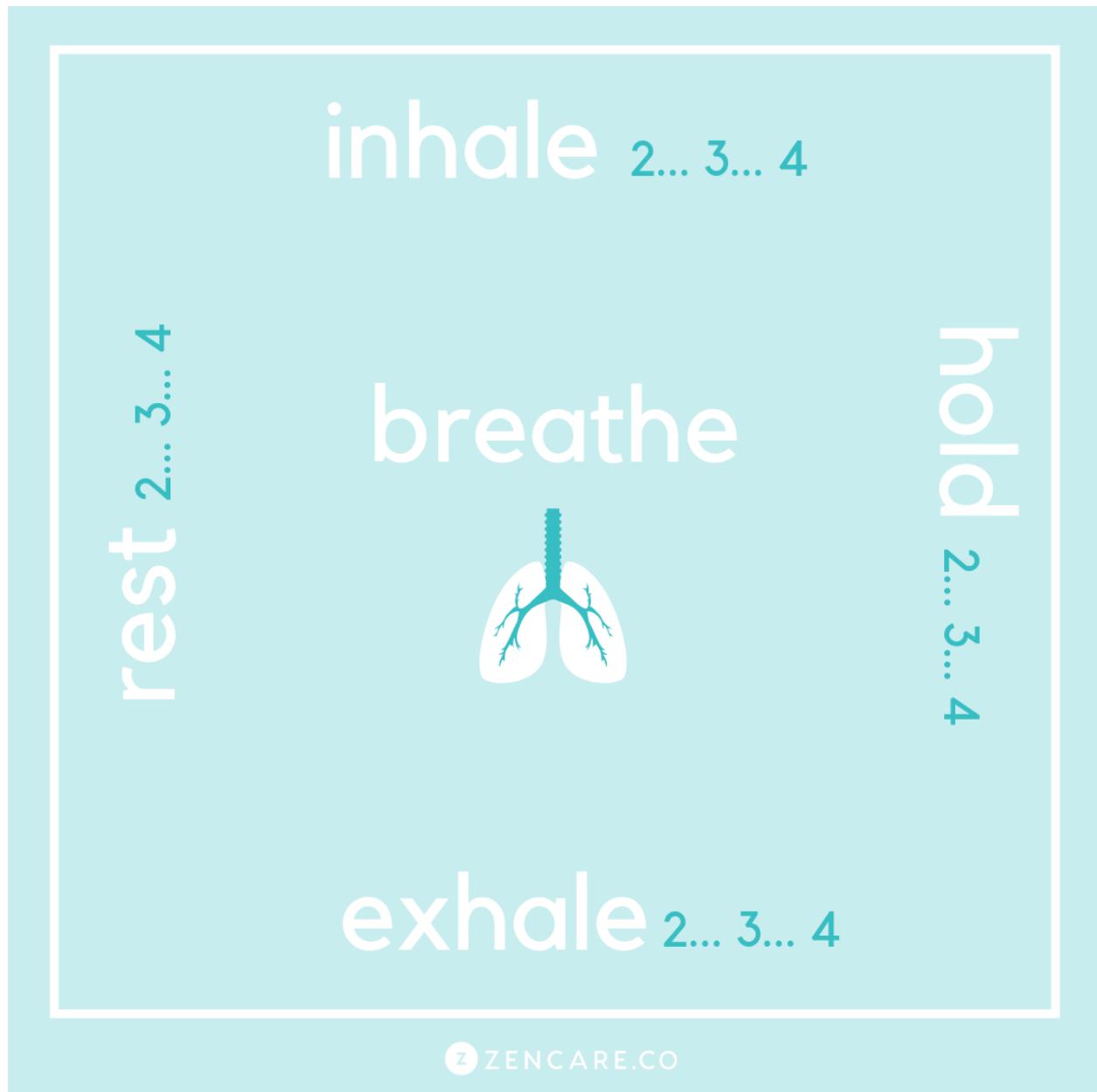


Picture someone meditating. What immediately comes to mind? Sitting cross-legged, saying, “Ohm,” and deep breathing? There is a reason breathing is a core part of meditation and, more generally, mindfulness and relaxation.

When we are stressed, our attention becomes narrowed on the thing that stresses us. We also experience a flood of hormones including cortisol that primes our body to act. Our muscles tighten. And our breath either halts or quickens depending on the need (holding your breath for a short-distance sprint can actually help, hence why your chest tightens when stressed).

Directly countering this automatic response by drawing our attention to our breath keeps it under our control and brings us down from this automatic stress response. It also gives us something steady to focus our attention on that can be a bit like a physical mantra for mindfulness. Although many adults, and kids too, are quick to discount this simple technique, give it a try. Mindful breathing for an extended period of time can be good prior to a known stressor, or quickly after noticing a stressor and needing a moment before reacting.

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This image is a guide for box breathing. To use it, begin inhaling at the top, tracing your finger or eyes along the top while counting to 4. Breathe in the whole time. Then hold it while tracing along the right sound while counting to 4. Then, with control, exhale everything out while counting to 4. And then rest, neither inhaling or exhaling for a count of 4, before trying again.

Practice this for 1-2 minutes on your own. Then try the challenges below (do each for 1-2 minutes):

Breathing Challenges

1. Practice mindful breathing in the shower, bath, or sauna. This combines a strong, present-moment sensory experience with deep breathing. Become familiar with this feeling of relaxation.
2. Practice mindful breathing while in a room in your home with music of your choice playing.
3. Practice mindful breathing while in a room in your home with no other sensory experiences.
4. Practice mindful breathing while commuting to work.
5. Identify a common stressor at work (calling a parent, starting a particular lesson, even a particular class) and practice mindful breathing **before** and **during** that stressor.
6. Incorporate mindful breathing throughout your day such that it becomes a normal response to stressors.

With each of these challenges, they get increasingly more difficult for mindful breathing because there are less supports or the stressor is more intense. Find your personal threshold where mindful breathing is useful and keep working it into your daily life.

You can also combine mindful breathing with some of the other activities with this module. It is particularly good with “Soles of the Feet” which helps keep you grounded in the present-moment through sensations.