

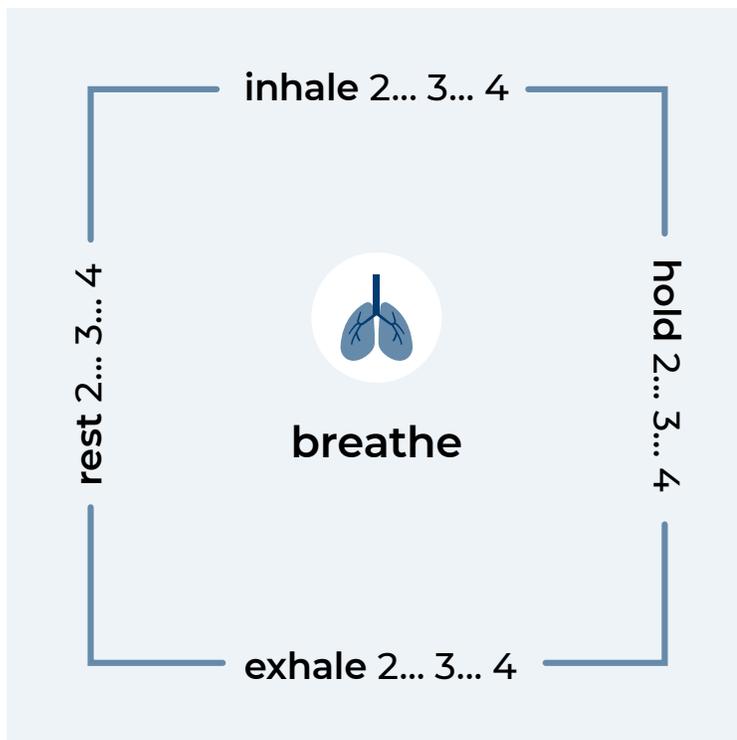
MODULE 4 ACTIVITY

Mindful Breathing

Picture someone meditating. What immediately comes to mind? Are they 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, which 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 our chests tighten 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 children are quick to discount this simple technique, we encourage you to give it a try. Mindful breathing can be used for an extended period of time prior to encountering a known stressor or quickly after noticing a stressor, when you need a moment to collect yourself before reacting.



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 side while counting to 4. Then, with control, exhale everything out while counting to 4. And then rest, neither inhaling nor exhaling for a count of 4, before trying again.

Practice this for 1–2 minutes on your own, then try the challenges on the next page. Spend 1–2 minutes with each one.

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 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, mindful breathing may become increasingly difficult because of waning supports or because the stressful incident is increasing in intensity. 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 in this module. It is particularly good with Soles of the Feet, which helps to keep you grounded in the present moment through sensations.

