

5-Minute Anxiety Relief Guide

5 breathing exercises · step-by-step · when to use each

Anxiety is your nervous system responding to a perceived threat. The fastest way to interrupt that response? Controlled breathing. It directly activates the parasympathetic nervous system — your body's "rest and digest" mode — within minutes.

These 5 techniques are backed by clinical research. You don't need experience, equipment, or a quiet room. You just need your breath.

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Exercise 1: Box Breathing (4-4-4-4)

Best for: Acute anxiety, panic, high-pressure moments · Time: 4 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

1.

Sit
upright
with
your
feet
flat
on
the floor.

2.

Exhale
completely
through
your
mouth.

3.

Inhal
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4 counts
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4.

Hold
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THE SCIENCE

Used by Navy SEALs, surgeons, and athletes. The equal ratio pattern synchronizes your heart rate and nervous system response, rapidly reducing cortisol.

Pro Tip: Visualize drawing the sides of a box as you breathe — trace each side for one phase.

Exercise 2: 4-7-8 Breathing

Best for: Falling asleep, post-argument calm, chronic anxiety · Time: 3–5 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

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4 times maximum (can cause dizziness — stay at the top if needed).

THE SCIENCE

Developed by Dr. Andrew Weil based on pranayama yoga. The extended exhale activates the vagus nerve, triggering the parasympathetic response.

Pro Tip: with just 2-3 cycles if new to breathwork. Build up gradually over days.

Exercise 3: Physiological Sigh

Best for: Immediate stress relief (fastest acting of all 5) · Time: 30 seconds

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THE SCIENCE

Discovered by neuroscientist Andrew Huberman. The double inhale maximally inflates the lungs and clears collapsed alveoli. The long exhale dumps CO₂ rapidly, immediately calming the nervous system.

Ø=Ü; Pro Tip: is the fastest technique in this guide. Use it anytime — even mid-conversation.

Exercise 4: Diaphragmatic (Belly) Breathing

Best for: Daily anxiety maintenance, building a baseline calm · Time: 5 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

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THE SCIENCE

Chest breathing (common in anxious people) keeps the sympathetic nervous system engaged. Diaphragmatic

breathing with belly expansion stimulates the vagus nerve with every breath.

Pro Tip: Practice this for 5 minutes daily, not just when anxious. Over time it rewires your default breathing pattern.

Exercise 5: 5-5-5 Grounding Breath

Best for: Dissociation, overwhelm, panic attacks — "coming back to earth" · Time: 3 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

1.

While breathing:
look around and name 5 things
you can SEE.

2.

Breathe in for 5 slow counts.

3.

Notice 5 things you can TOUCH —
feel them with your hands.

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THE SCIENCE

Combines sensory grounding (proven to interrupt dissociation and rumination) with paced breathing. The 5-second breath ratio promotes heart rate variability (HRV), a key marker of resilience.

Pro Tip: "5-5-5" on a sticky note or phone lock screen so you remember it when overwhelmed.

Quick Reference Card

WHICH TECHNIQUE TO USE WHEN

Right now, I feel panicked

! Physiological Sigh (30 sec) then Box Breathing

Can't fall asleep

! 4-7-8 Breathing in bed

Overwhelmed / can't focus

! 5-5-5 Grounding Breath

Daily stress maintenance

! 5 min diaphragmatic breathing in the morning

Big presentation / high stakes

! Box Breathing for 4 minutes beforehand

BUILD THE HABIT: 30-DAY CHALLENGE

Pick ONE technique and practice it for 5 minutes every morning for 30 days. That's it. Don't switch techniques. Don't try to do all five. Just one, consistently.

By day 14, you'll notice faster relief. By day 30, your baseline anxiety level will be measurably lower. The research on this is unambiguous — consistency beats perfection every time.

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