Pause Care

Breathe through *it.*

A pocket guide to calming panic: why breathing works, four techniques to try, and a plan for your next hard moment.



Inside

Why your breath can calm your body · 4 breathing techniques

5-4-3-2-1 grounding · Your panic plan, ready to keep

WHY IT WORKS

Your breath is the one part of panic *you can steer.*

During panic, your body's alarm system takes over: your heart races, your breathing speeds up and your chest tightens. You can't switch off a racing heart by deciding to, but you **can** change how you breathe, and your breathing talks to the rest of that system.

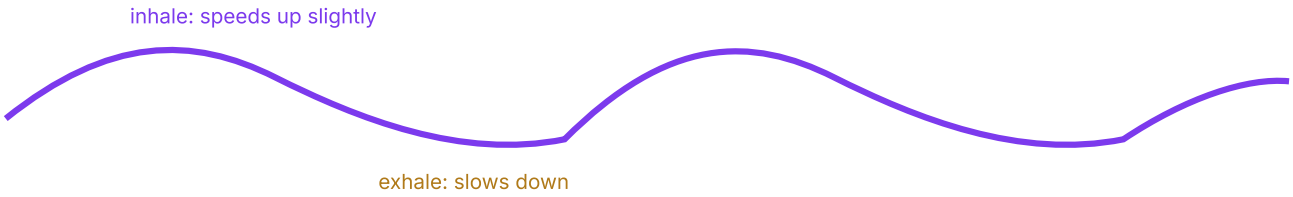
Fast, shallow breathing

- Keeps the body on high alert
- Can cause dizziness and tingling
- Feeds the feeling that something is wrong

Slow breathing, long exhale

- Each slow exhale helps your heart rate ease down
- Shifts the body toward "rest and digest"
- Gives an anxious mind one simple thing to do

Heart rate follows your breath



That's why most calming techniques make the **exhale longer than the inhale**. Clinicians call this rhythm respiratory sinus arrhythmia, and it's a normal, healthy part of how your heart works.

Slow breathing calms body and mind

A 2018 review of studies in healthy adults found that breathing under 10 times a minute increased heart rate variability, a sign of the calming parasympathetic system at work, alongside less anxiety and more relaxation.

Zaccaro et al., Frontiers in Human Neuroscience, 2018

Five minutes a day made a difference

In a month-long Stanford study, five minutes a day of breathing exercises improved mood more than the same time spent on mindfulness meditation, and the long-exhale "cyclic sigh" did best.

Balban et al., Cell Reports Medicine, 2023

FOUR TECHNIQUES

Start with these *two.*

They're the gentlest and the easiest to remember when your heart is pounding.



BEST DURING PANIC

Slow exhale (4 in, 6 out)

in 4 | out 6

1. Breathe in gently through your nose for 4.
2. Breathe out slowly, through your mouth or nose, for 6.
3. Repeat for about a minute, or until the wave starts to drop.

Tip: keep the breaths small. You don't need to fill your lungs, just slow down.



DAILY PRACTICE

Cyclic sighing

in | + top up | long, slow out

1. Breathe in through your nose.
2. When your lungs feel full, take a second short sip of air on top.
3. Let it all out in a long, slow breath through your mouth.
4. Repeat for up to 5 minutes.

Why this one: it was the most effective technique in the 2023 Stanford study.

FOUR TECHNIQUES

Two classics, *timed.*

Use these when you have a little more room to focus. If a hold feels too long, count faster: the shape matters more than the seconds.



WINDING DOWN

4-7-8 breathing

4	hold 7	out 8

1. Breathe in quietly through your nose for 4.
2. Hold for 7.
3. Breathe out through your mouth for 8, with a soft "whoosh".
4. Do 4 rounds to start.

Feeling dizzy? Take smaller breaths and count faster, or switch to the slow exhale.



STRESS & FOCUS

Box breathing

in 4	hold 4	out 4	hold 4

1. Breathe in for 4.
2. Hold for 4.
3. Breathe out for 4.
4. Hold, lungs empty, for 4. Repeat 4 times.

Use it before a meeting, an exam or a hard conversation. It works with your eyes open.

● Breathe in ● Hold ● Breathe out

WHEN YOUR THOUGHTS ARE RACING

5-4-3-2-1 *grounding.*

Panic pulls your attention inward, to your heartbeat and your worst-case thoughts. Grounding points it back out at the room you're in. Go slowly, and describe each thing in detail.

5	4	3	2	1
See	**Feel**	**Hear**	**Smell**	**Taste**
A blue mug, light on the wall, your own hands	Feet on the floor, fabric of your sleeve	A fan, distant traffic, your breathing	Soap, coffee, fresh air	Toothpaste, or a sip of water

Make it work better

1. **Say it out loud** if you can. Hearing your own voice adds another sense.
2. **Can't smell or taste anything?** Name ones you like, or take a sip of water.
3. **Pair it with breathing.** If your breath is racing too, do a minute of slow exhales first.
4. **Finish with one long exhale** and notice what has changed.



KEEP THIS SOMEWHERE YOU'LL SEE IT

Your panic *plan.*

It's hard to think clearly in the middle of panic. Decide now, on a calm day, what you'll do, then cut this out or save a photo of it.

✂ cut along the line

When panic starts, I will:

1. **Name it.** "This is panic. It's frightening, but it will pass."
2. **Breathe slowly.** In for 4, out for 6.
3. **Ground myself.** Name 5 things I can see.
4. **Soften my body.** Drop my shoulders, unclench my hands.
5. **Let it pass.** Stay where I am if I safely can.

The technique that helps me most: _____

Someone I can call or text: _____

Something that comforts me: _____

Most panic attacks last 5 to 20 minutes, and symptoms usually peak within about 10. If you have chest pain, or aren't sure this is panic, get medical help straight away.

NEXT TIME, YOU DON'T HAVE TO COUNT

Let a calm voice *do the counting.*



Remembering a technique in the middle of panic is hard. Pause Care puts everything in this guide one tap away, so all you have to do is follow.



- **One-tap Panic Button.** A calm voice starts breathing with you straight away, with no setup.
- **Every technique here, guided.** 4-7-8, box breathing and more, with Pip breathing alongside you.
- **Interactive 5-4-3-2-1 grounding** that walks you through each sense.
- **Voice Memories.** Keep recordings of the people who calm you, ready to play.
- **Learn what works for you** with a quick check-in after every session.

Free on the App Store

Scan with your iPhone camera, or search **Pause Care**.
apps.apple.com/app/id6757077167

Free to download with an optional subscription. iPhone only for now.

LOOKING AFTER YOURSELF

When to get help

Get emergency help straight away if you have chest pain, pain spreading to your arm or jaw, trouble breathing that doesn't ease, or you aren't sure whether this is panic. It's always OK to get checked.

- **See a doctor** if this is your first panic attack, if they keep happening, or if you've started avoiding places because of them.
- **Panic attacks are very treatable.** Talking therapies such as CBT work well, and a doctor can talk you through your options.
- **If you're thinking about harming yourself,** in the US call or text **988**. Elsewhere, contact your local emergency number or crisis line.

Sources

1. Balban MY, Neri E, Kogon MM, et al. Brief structured respiration practices enhance mood and reduce physiological arousal. *Cell Reports Medicine*. 2023;4(1):100895.
2. Zaccaro A, Piarulli A, Laurino M, et al. How breath-control can change your life: a systematic review on psycho-physiological correlates of slow breathing. *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*. 2018;12:353.
3. NHS. Understanding panic attacks. nhs.uk
4. HSE (Ireland). Panic attacks. hse.ie

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