HOW BREATHING REDUCES ANXIETY
by Lisa Damour, PhD

When we’re anxious, the brain’s primitive "fight or flight" system
• sends the heart and lungs into overdrive
• to deliver heavily oxygenated blood to our large muscles
• in case we need to attack or run

If anxiety becomes too intense, controlled breathing can help because
• nerves on the surface of the lungs communicate with the brain
• breathing deeply and slowly tells these nerves that all is well
• the nerves send this reassuring message to the brain
• which quiets the anxiety alarm

Try square breathing
• inhale slowly for a count of three
• hold your breath for a count of three
• exhale slowly for a count of three
• wait for a count of three, then begin the cycle again

If you feel anxious often or your anxiety becomes very intense very quickly, use calm moments to practice square breathing. A little practice will make it easier to slip into square breathing when your anxiety starts to ramp up.