The 5-Minute Calm Guide

Five simple breathing and grounding skills for anxious moments, panic and sleepless nights.

Stress, worry and sleepless nights are common, and a national survey found that around 1 in 3 adults in Pakistan is living with a mental health condition. These five skills take five minutes or less. Practise them when you are calm, so they come naturally when you need them. They work at home, in the office, in traffic or before an exam or meeting.

Skill 1 · 2 minutes

Box breathing

Use it when: your heart is racing or you feel tense before a meeting.

1. Breathe in through your nose for a count of 4.
2. Hold your breath for 4.
3. Breathe out slowly through your mouth for 4.
4. Hold for 4. Repeat 4 to 6 times.

Tip: trace a square with your finger as you count.

Skill 2 · 2 minutes

4-7-8 breathing

Use it when: you cannot fall asleep or your mind will not switch off.

1. Breathe out fully through your mouth.
2. Breathe in quietly through your nose for 4.
3. Hold for 7.
4. Breathe out through your mouth for 8. Repeat 4 times.

Tip: if 7 feels too long, use 3-5-6. The long out-breath is what calms you.

Skill 3 · 3 minutes

5-4-3-2-1 grounding

Use it when: you feel panic, flashbacks or that you are not quite present.

1. Name 5 things you can see.
2. Name 4 things you can touch, and touch them.
3. Name 3 things you can hear.
4. Name 2 things you can smell.
5. Name 1 thing you can taste.

Tip: say them out loud, quietly. Using your voice adds to the effect.

Skill 4 · 5 minutes

Progressive muscle relaxation

Use it when: your body holds stress in your shoulders, jaw or stomach.

1. Sit or lie down comfortably.
2. Tighten your feet for 5 seconds, then release for 10.
3. Move up: legs, stomach, hands, arms, shoulders, face.
4. Notice the difference between tension and calm.

Tip: end with three slow breaths.

Skill 5 · 1 minute

Hand on heart, slow breath

Use it when: you feel overwhelmed, upset or after a difficult conversation.

1. Place one hand on your chest and one on your stomach.
2. Breathe in slowly so the lower hand rises.
3. As you breathe out, say a calming phrase to yourself, in any language or words that comfort you.
4. Repeat 5 to 10 times.

Tip: many people find a short prayer or dhikr works well here.

When to talk to someone

These skills help in the moment, but they do not replace care. Consider speaking with a counsellor if:

- worry, low mood or irritability lasts more than two weeks

- you have trouble sleeping, working or looking after your family
- you are using alcohol or drugs to cope
- anger is hurting your relationships
- you feel unsafe at home

Book a free 15-minute session

SABRIDGINGUS Private Limited offers counselling online anywhere in Pakistan, and in person in Lahore, modelled on Washington State standards. Teresa Andrea Jimenez counsels in English, and we provide an Urdu translator for clients who prefer Urdu.

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