

BREATHE • REGULATE • PERFORM • RECOVER

A Daily Nervous System Regulation Protocol for Athletes & First Responders

THE COMPLETE ATHLETE

The goal is not to eliminate stress. The goal is to become better at moving between states.

ACTIVATE → PERFORM → REGULATE → RECOVER → SLEEP

Train the skill when pressure is **LOW** so it is available when pressure is **HIGH**. Breathing gives you a practical way to influence arousal, attention and recovery. After a game, match, shift or difficult call, intentional downshifting can help signal that the high-demand moment is over.

1 PHYSIOLOGICAL SIGH

THE RAPID RESET

HOW Inhale through the nose → take a second short “top-up” inhale → long, complete exhale through the mouth. Repeat 1–3 times.

BEST FOR A mistake, high-pressure moment, emotional spike, after a call, between plays/shifts, or whenever you need a fast reset.

BENEFITS Can rapidly increase calm while keeping you alert. Repeated cyclic sighing has also been studied as a short daily breathing practice.

USE IT: “I need to reset right now.”

2 BOX BREATHING

CONTROL + FOCUS

HOW Inhale 4 → hold 4 → exhale 4 → hold 4. Repeat 3–5 comfortable rounds. Do not force the holds.

BEST FOR Pre-performance, pre-call preparation, waiting periods, regaining focus, or when you want calm without becoming sleepy.

BENEFITS Creates a predictable rhythm, anchors attention to the present and can help reduce stress arousal.

USE IT: “Slow it down. Get clear. Be intentional.”

3 4–7–8 BREATHING

THE DOWNSHIFT

HOW Inhale through the nose for 4 → hold 7 → exhale slowly through the mouth for 8. Start with 3–4 rounds.

BEST FOR After competition/training, after a shift, before bed, or when the body is tired but the mind is still running.

BENEFITS The counting redirects attention away from repetitive thoughts; the long exhale supports relaxation and preparation for sleep.

USE IT: “The performance is over. I can let go now.”

4 NSDR

DEEP RECOVERY

HOW Lie down or recline somewhere safe. Close your eyes and follow a guided 10–30 minute Non-Sleep Deep Rest practice. At bedtime or after waking, a longer guided session may be useful.

BEST FOR Midday recovery, after demanding performance/work, poor-sleep days, bedtime, or difficulty falling back asleep.

BENEFITS NSDR is a guided deep-rest practice popularized by Dr. Andrew Huberman. It is intended to quiet mental activity and support relaxation/recovery; it does not replace adequate sleep.

USE IT: “My brain and body need recovery, not more stimulation.”

PRACTICE SAFELY Use these tools only when it is safe to shift attention inward — never while driving, operating equipment, actively responding to an emergency, in water, or when full situational awareness is required. Stop if dizzy or light-headed. If you have a heart/lung condition or concerns about breath-holding, speak with a qualified health professional.

MY DAILY REGULATION & SLEEP PROTOCOL

Build a consistent system — not a tool you only reach for when things go wrong

Pressure → Breath → Regulation → Clear Thinking → Intentional Response

THE DAILY SYSTEM

MOMENT	TOOL	PURPOSE	MY PLAN / CHECK
Morning / start of day	1–3 physiological sighs	Check in + establish calm alertness	☐ _____
Before performance / call	Box breathing	Calm + focused preparation	☐ _____
During pressure	1 physiological sigh	Rapid reset + next-action focus	☐ _____
After game / call / shift	3 physiological sighs	Begin the downshift	☐ _____
Recovery window	10–20 min NSDR	Deep rest + decompression	☐ _____
Before bed	4–7–8 breathing	Prepare body + mind for sleep	☐ _____
Awake during the night	NSDR / slow breathing	Rest instead of fighting sleep	☐ _____

POST-PERFORMANCE / POST-CALL: MY OFF SWITCH

1 DISCHARGE Walk • stretch • shower • change clothes Create a transition.	2 BREATHE 3 physiological sighs Signal the downshift.	3 SLOW 2–5 min slow breathing / 4–7–8 Reduce arousal.	4 RECOVER 10–20 min NSDR Give brain + body deep rest.	5 SLEEP Dark • cool • consistent routine Protect restoration.
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BUILD MY PERSONAL PROTOCOL

My biggest signs that my nervous system is still ‘ON’ are:

The tool I will practice DAILY — even when I feel good — is:

My post-performance / post-call reset will be:

My consistent pre-sleep cue or routine will be:

PRACTICE WHEN YOU DON’T NEED IT — SO YOUR BODY RECOGNIZES THE PATH WHEN YOU DO.

Your nervous system may still be carrying the game, match, shift or call after it ends. Give it consistent cues that the high-demand moment is over and recovery can begin.

Recover better → Sleep better → Think clearer → Regulate faster → Perform better

EDUCATIONAL NOTE & SOURCES Educational performance/recovery resource; not medical treatment. Sources consulted: Huberman Lab — NSDR and Daily Blueprint; American Heart Association — Stress Management / Box Breathing; Cleveland Clinic — 4–7–8 Breathing. NSDR is a term coined/popularized by Andrew Huberman for guided deep-rest practices.