

The Gentle Start

Your Guide to Beginning This Year with Intention, Not Pressure

Caregiving doesn't reset on January 1st. This guide is your permission slip to start gently.

Your Three Permissions

1. You are allowed to enter this year gently. Walk in slowly, at whatever pace your life allows.
2. You are allowed to need support. Needing something for yourself makes you human.
3. You are allowed to let this year be about sustainability, not achievement.

Extended Exhale Breathing (4-6 Breathing)

When you exhale longer than you inhale, you activate your parasympathetic nervous system—your body's 'safe to rest' signal.

The Practice:

- Start with a clearing breath: Big inhale through your nose... sigh it out through your mouth
- Inhale through your nose for 4 counts
- Exhale slowly through your mouth for 6 counts
- Repeat 4-5 times, or until you feel a shift

Habit Stacking: Moments to Try

Attach your breathing practice to something you already do. Your existing habit becomes the trigger.

Morning:

- While coffee brews
- After brushing teeth
- Starting your computer
- First check on loved one

Evening:

- After everyone is settled
- Getting into bed
- Washing dishes

Throughout the Day:

- Giving medications
- Washing your hands
- At red lights
- Before checking email

My Commitment

When I _____,

I will take three deep breaths for about one minute.

For the Hard Days

A Quick Reference When You Need It Most

When Everything Feels Heavy, Remember:

- You're tired because your nervous system has been working overtime to protect you.
- This is not weakness. This is your body doing its job under impossible circumstances.
- You don't have to feel better. You just have to breathe.
- Five intentional breaths can change your next five minutes.

60-Second Reset

- Ground:** Notice your feet on the floor. Press them down gently.
- Notice:** Where are you holding tension? Shoulders? Jaw? Stomach?
- Release:** Let your shoulders drop. Unclench your jaw.
- Breathe:** One hand on heart. Inhale 4 counts. Exhale 6 counts.
- Repeat:** 3-5 rounds. Let your breath return to normal.
- Acknowledge** You just did something for yourself. That matters.

Words for the Exhale

As you breathe out, let one of these settle in your mind:

"I am doing enough."

"This moment is temporary."

"I can only do what I can do."

"I am allowed to rest."

Your Notes

A large rectangular area with a white background and a light gray border, containing several horizontal dotted lines for writing notes.