

Discomfort: Where the Magic Happens

If it feels uncomfortable, chances are, you're in the right place.

Growth isn't meant to feel easy.

It asks you to put in effort, face struggle, and sometimes let go of what feels safe.

It means getting uncomfortable, rethinking old habits, and doing things you're not good at yet.

You might have to trade comfort for clarity. Familiar patterns for forward movement.

No surprise so many people choose to stay where they are.

But if you want to evolve — really evolve — discomfort isn't the obstacle.

It's the invitation.

You say, "but hey, why would I want to grow?" Well, you're here. You're part of our tribe that's all about growth. Not just in judo but in life, as a person as well. Remember our slogan '**You belong here. You grow here.**' So, it's a path you either consciously or unconsciously chose. Welcome.

Discomfort is a very big part of growth so it's paramount to understand how it works and how you can navigate it so it's not an annoyance but a sign: it's your time to grow.

But What Is Discomfort, Really?

→ The Physiology

- Discomfort is a *neurobiological alert system*. It triggers the **amygdala** (threat centre), increases **cortisol**, activates **sympathetic nervous system**.
- It's your body preparing to run, fight, or shut down – you ever heard of fight-flight-freeze? It's when your brain is trying to make a decision in a split second whether it should get into fight, run as in flight or shut down completely that is to freeze.
- Even though there is no danger, your body *thinks* there **might** be.

What's Actually Happening in Your Body When You Feel Discomfort

Discomfort isn't just "a feeling." It's a full-body, brain-to-gut, threat detection response.

The moment you face something unfamiliar, uncertain, or challenging — even something as small as posting a video, trying a new technique, or speaking up in class — your brain registers potential danger. It hasn't met that situation before so rightfully it will think it could be dangerous.

Here's what kicks in:

- **The amygdala** — your brain's threat centre — lights up. It doesn't know the difference between public speaking and a lion attack.
- **Cortisol levels** spike — your stress hormone. It sharpens your senses but also increases tension, heart rate, and the urge to retreat. Ever been to a competition, ready

to get on the mat, your heart racing, you feel like running but your hearing and vision feel razor sharp? That's because of your increased cortisol. Your body is doing its work. And if you're a seasoned athlete? You might still be feeling it, just a little less intense.

- Your **sympathetic nervous system** activates — this is your fight, flight, or freeze mode. Breathing gets shallow. Muscles tense. Focus narrows.

This system is ancient — built for survival, not self-development.

That means your body reacts to *growth* the same way it reacts to *danger*! Funny, innit!

Trying something new? Your body prepares to run.

Challenging yourself physically or emotionally? Your brain flags it as a potential threat.

Even something as ordinary as asking for help or trying a harder round in training can trigger it.

And that's where most people back off, because their biology is trying to protect them and they give in to it. If they knew how to handle it and use it to their own advantage, they would stay and fight. And we want you to stay and fight, so we're going to teach you how to use it.

Your work in this program is to rewire this instinct — not by shutting it off, but by noticing it, naming it, and moving through it. It's not easy but I promise you it's well worth it.

→ The Psychology

- Discomfort is tied to *uncertainty, social exposure, and challenge*.
- Your brain registers “unknown” as unsafe — even if it's just trying a new move or speaking up.
- It doesn't want growth. It wants **familiarity** and **control**.

Why Discomfort Feels So Uncomfortable (Even When You're Not in Danger)

Because your brain treats it like a **threat to survival** — not a tool for growth.

Here's the truth most people miss:

Your body isn't reacting to the situation — it's reacting to what the situation *represents*.

Let's break it down:

1. Uncertainty triggers loss of control.

Your brain loves predictability. It's always trying to forecast what's next — so it can keep you safe.

When you step into the unknown (new technique, new challenge, new version of yourself), it can't predict the outcome.

No prediction = possible threat.

➔ Discomfort here feels like tension, hesitation, overthinking.

Social exposure feels like rejection risk.

Being judged, seen, or misunderstood once meant exile from the tribe — literal danger. That wiring still runs the show. So even posting a training video, asking a question in class, or speaking your truth can feel threatening.

➔ Discomfort here feels like vulnerability, shame, self-doubt.

3. Challenge equals risk of failure.

Every time you stretch your limits — physically or emotionally — you confront the chance that you might not succeed.

Your brain sees failure not as feedback, but as a *hit to identity*.

And that hits hard.

➔ Discomfort here feels like anxiety, self-sabotage, “I’ll do it later.”

In short:

Discomfort feels so uncomfortable because your brain confuses growth with danger.

It’s not just uncomfortable — it’s *misinterpreted as a threat to your safety, your belonging, or your worth which is freaking you out.*

If you can stay present with that feeling — breathe through it, name it, and move anyway — you teach your brain a new truth:

“This isn’t danger. This is progress.”

That’s the work. Your work.

What Your Brain Will Do To Protect You From It

The brain’s job is to **keep you alive**, not help you evolve, so it will do **everything** it can to *pull you away from stress*:

- Excuses (“...might not make it due to work..”)
- Overthinking (“I’m gonna do this session but then skip the next one so ...”)
- Fatigue (“God, I’m so tired, I don’t think I can do tonight, sorry guys.”)
- Procrastination (“I’m looking to get back into judo but not just yet, maybe next month or after.”)
- “Sudden” hunger or distractions (TV, scrolling, etc.)

The Mechanics of Escape:

- **Amygdala** activates which increases adrenaline

(Adrenaline is like a chemical boost that helps you survive danger:

- ❖ Makes your **heart beat faster** (so blood gets to muscles quickly)

- ❖ **Widens airways** (so you can take in more oxygen)
- ❖ **Sharpens focus** (to scan for danger)
- ❖ **Redirects energy** away from digestion or long-term thinking
- ❖ Increases **muscle tension** (ready to fight or flee)

This is why discomfort *feels* so intense — your whole body is shifting into **survival mode**, even if you're just trying to do something new or challenging.

- **Prefrontal cortex** (decision-making) deactivates

Your **prefrontal cortex** is the part of your brain right behind your forehead — and it's basically your **inner coach**.

It's responsible for:

- Rational decision-making
- Planning and goal setting
- Emotional regulation
- Impulse control
- Self-awareness
- Perspective-taking

It's what helps you *pause, think, and choose* your next move — instead of reacting on autopilot.

But here's the problem:

When the amygdala sounds the alarm (danger! discomfort! exposure!), your **body prioritizes survival** over smart thinking.

It's a brain-wide reshuffle of resources.

The body says:

"We don't need deep thinking right now — we need to survive."

So blood flow is **diverted away from the prefrontal cortex** and toward the parts of the brain and body that can help you fight, flee, or freeze.

Result?

You can react fast.

But you can't reflect, plan, or stay calm.

That's why under pressure you might:

- Forget your technique mid-match
- Say something you regret

- Freeze in a grading or meeting
- Avoid action because it “feels too much”

It’s because your **prefrontal cortex has gone offline** — and the survival brain has taken the wheel.

The Solution?

You need to **interrupt the panic loop** and bring the prefrontal cortex *back online* by:

- Naming what’s happening (“This is discomfort. Not danger.”) Tell your brain what it is it’s experiencing.
- Using long exhales (breath slows the stress response)
- Focusing attention on one physical anchor (e.g., gripping a towel, feeling your feet)

That *re-regulates* your system — and brings your decision-making power back.

Your prefrontal cortex is like the calm, focused coach in your corner.

But when stress spikes, the brain hands the mic to the panicked crowd instead.

Your work is to get **the coach back in the room** — before making your next move.

- Default response: *avoidance loop*

! When you’re “thinking yourself out of it,” you’re in a neurological feedback loop.

How to Notice, Name, and Navigate It

Step 1: Notice It

When your body goes into discomfort, you might not even realise at first what it is you’re feeling. Always check in with yourself: “Where do I feel this?” (cues: tight throat, shallow breath, racing thoughts, hesitation before action) and once you identified the feeling itself, ask yourself: “What am I avoiding right now?”

In short:

Cue: tight throat, shallow breath, racing thoughts, hesitation before action

- Ask: “*Where do I feel this?*” (throat, chest, belly?)
- Ask: “*What am I avoiding right now?*”

Step 2: Name It

“This is discomfort. Not danger.”

Naming activates the **prefrontal cortex** — brings back *choice*.

- Say it out loud.
- Write down so you can see it too: “Right now, I feel _____ and my impulse is to _____.”

Oh, by the way – do you know why writing down everything helps enormously on your personal development journey?

It Changes Everything - But How?

Writing isn't just reflection — it's **reconstruction**.

It helps you make sense of things, detach from emotional loops, and actually *rebuild* how you think.

Here's why it works:

1. It Externalises the Noise

When thoughts stay in your head, they swirl.

They loop. They bounce off each other. They build emotional static.

When you write, you *move the storm from inside your body to outside on the page*.

That alone gives you **space** — to observe, to breathe, to choose how to respond.

2. It Activates the Prefrontal Cortex

Writing slows you down just enough to **engage your thinking brain** — especially when you're overwhelmed or caught in emotional reactivity.

It pulls your brain *out* of the fight/flight response and *into* clarity and reasoning.

3. It Makes the Invisible Visible

When a thought becomes text, it becomes something you can:

- Look at
- Question
- Reframe
- Rewrite

This is why journaling, prompts, and identity work are so powerful — because they **turn emotion into information**.

4. It Creates New Neural Pathways

Writing rewires thoughts.

When you write consistently, especially about identity and possibility, you're literally *installing new beliefs* in your brain.

Neuroplasticity 101.

Think of it like grip training — every rep strengthens a pattern.

5. It Gives You Proof

Writing also documents thoughts.

On the hard days, you can flip back and see *your own progress*.

You stop asking, “Am I really changing?”

Because you *see the receipts*.

Bottom line: Writing is how you turn thoughts into tools.
It's how you stop reacting and start rebuilding.

Step 3: Navigate It

Practice stillness under pressure. Stay with the feeling. Always remember that doing something about a feeling is not mandatory. It's a choice your nervous system makes but you don't have to obey. That's how you'll teach yourself how to navigate discomfort.

Tools:

- **Breath reset:** 4-in / 6-out x 5 rounds This will help you get grounded. Listen to your inhaling and exhaling, it brings you back to present, down to earth. Breathing is the bridge between your **sympathetic** (stress) and **parasympathetic** (calm) systems. Build it and use it!

- **Physical anchoring:** Static hold (wall sit, dead hang)

It's controlled and not dangerous but your body still feels the burn, the tension, the “I want to quit” reflex. This makes it the perfect training ground for building response capacity — the ability to choose your response instead of reacting by flinching, quitting, or panicking.

If you can breathe and stay composed in a wall sit — you're teaching your system to do the same when life gets hard.

- **Reframe prompt:**
 - Instead of “I can't handle this,” → “This is what getting stronger feels like.”
 - Instead of “This isn't for me,” → “This is new and new is meant to feel weird.”

The Judo of Discomfort

- Judo is not comfortable. You're off-balance. You're adapting. You fall.
- Every throw begins with *discomfort* — kuzushi is the art of unsettling.
- Use the mat as your lab:
 - Where do you resist pressure?
 - What makes you stop mid-grip fight or hesitate on an attack?

“You train your throws. Train your thresholds too.”

Why This Matters Off the Mat

Discomfort isn't always loud. It's not just sweat, strain, or fight-or-flight. More often, it's subtle, quiet, and internal.

It shows up in the everyday choices that **stretch your identity** — the ones that ask you to be bold, clear, or honest when it would be easier not to be.

Discomfort is:

- **Saying no** when you're expected to say yes — risking disapproval to stay in alignment with your values.
- **Starting before you feel ready** — putting yourself in the arena while your hands are still shaking.
- **Leaving what's familiar** — even if it's comfortable — to pursue what's actually meaningful to you.

That's the discomfort that shapes people.

That's the kind that doesn't get applause, but **changes everything**.

The More Discomfort You Can Tolerate, The More Freedom You Earn

Why? Because discomfort is the *toll gate* between who you are and who you're becoming.

If you avoid it:

- You stay in the loop.
- You keep saying yes when you mean no.
- You keep waiting for perfect conditions.
- You keep playing safe and calling it smart.

But when you stay in it — just a little longer:

- You build trust in yourself.
- You act from clarity, not fear.
- You prove to your nervous system that **you can handle more** than it thought you could.

That's what freedom feels like.

Not the absence of discomfort, that's unavailable to us 😊 — but the ability to *move through it on purpose*.

Every Time You Stay In It, You Rewire the System

Every rep you do under pressure...

Every honest conversation you don't avoid...

Every time you walk into training when you're nervous or tired...

That's willpower but also **rewiring**.

You're:

- Reprogramming how your brain reads stress
- Teaching your body what *safe intensity* feels like
- Building emotional strength like it's muscle

Conclusion

Discomfort isn't the enemy but the upgrade process.

Stay in it and you change what your system believes is possible.

Look at Anna. She's come to love discomfort. She embraces it. She's waiting for it to appear so she leaps into action. When she's got a gym day, she'd wait until discomfort creeps in and she doesn't feel like going and then – and only then – she gets going. She says she does this to not just train the body but the mind too. Isn't that genius.

Spoiler alert: you have to be pretty disciplined to play this game coz otherwise you just won't go



Your Discomfort Tracking Tool

Daily Prompts:

- When did I feel discomfort today?
- What did I do next?
- Did I fight or fly?

Weekly Challenge Ideas:

- Cold exposure
- Sparring someone better than you
- Training in front of others
- Posting your training video
- Speaking up about a boundary

Somatic Tools

1. Static holds under breath control

– Teach your body to feel discomfort without *panicking*

2. Breath Training (4/6)

– Builds parasympathetic control

3. 10-second pause habit

– Every time discomfort hits:

- Pause
- Breathe
- Label it
- Choose action

Coaching Reflection Prompts

1. What am I making discomfort mean about me?
2. When was the last time I got uncomfortable *and* something good came from it?
3. What discomfort am I avoiding that's keeping me stuck?
4. If I fully trusted myself — what would I do anyway?

Integration Plan

- **Week 1:** Awareness — track discomfort
- **Week 2:** Response — pause, reframe
- **Week 3:** Action — do it anyway
- **Week 4:** Ownership — seek it out deliberately

Week 1: Awareness — Track the Flinch

Theme: *You can't change what you don't notice.*

This week is about becoming fluent in your own patterns. This is to observe and not to fix just yet.

Every time you feel hesitation, tightness, resistance — pause.

That's your signal. That's discomfort knocking. Please don't judge. You're only becoming aware, this is only normal at this stage.

Challenge:

- Track one discomfort moment every day
- Write it down: *What happened? What did I feel? What did I do?*
- Look for patterns (same situation? same people? same internal voice?)

Why this matters:

Most people are run by their discomfort without ever realizing it. Awareness is the first rep in rewiring the loop.

"Ah, there you are. I see you now."

Week 2: Response — Pause, Breathe, Reframe

Theme: *Feeling discomfort is normal. Reacting automatically is optional.*

Now that you're noticing it — this week is about **interrupting the reflex**. Instead of fleeing or freezing, you'll pause. Reclaim the moment.

Challenge:

- Use the **10-second rule**:
When discomfort hits → count to 10 → breathe → *then* choose what to do.
- Practice naming the feeling:
"This is discomfort. Not danger."
- Practice reframing:
"This is what growth feels like."
"This feels hard — because it matters."

Why this matters:

This is how you start taking your power back. You're rebuilding trust in your ability to *feel hard things and still lead yourself*.

"I can stay here. I don't have to run."

Week 3: Action — Do It Anyway

Theme: *Courage isn't about not feeling fear. It's about moving through it.*

This is the week you do the thing *you've been avoiding*. Doesn't have to be big — it just has to be real.

Challenge:

- Every day, do **one small thing** that makes you hesitate.
Could be:
 - Post something honest
 - Start training before you feel ready
 - Say no when you usually say yes
 - Ask a question you'd usually hold in
- Focus on the act — not the outcome

Why this matters:

Confidence doesn't come first. It comes *after* action. This week builds momentum through movement.

"Even scared, I go."

Week 4: Ownership — Seek Discomfort Deliberately

Theme: *Discomfort is no longer something to fear. It's something you train with.*

This week flips the script — you're not just reacting to discomfort anymore. You're choosing it.

Challenge:

- Pick **one deliberate discomfort rep** to repeat 3–4x this week
e.g. Sparring with someone who pushes you
Saying what you mean in a tricky conversation
Training on your off-day — on purpose
- Write a letter to your Week 1 self about who you've become

Why this matters:

Growth is no longer accidental — it's intentional.

You've built the edge. Now you *sharpen it on purpose*.

"I don't avoid discomfort anymore — I work with it."

Closing Identity Prompt

"Who am I becoming by staying in the discomfort?" "Who do I want to become?"

Write a letter from your *future self* — 30 days from now — thanking you for facing the thing you've been avoiding.