

Sister Science - Beyond Asana Course
Your Perfect Pranayama Practice
Module 2: Lesson 2

Hi There,

This is Andy here, co-founder of Yoga Veda Institute & Director of the Sacred Breath Self Healing retreat as well as instructor of Pranayama, Meditation and Yoga Philosophy inside our Ayurveda Yoga Therapy Foundation Teacher Training Course.

Today we are going to introduce the practice of Pranayama and how it applies in ayurveda, but first let's begin by making a quick review of what is pranayama in the first place.

Pranayama as most of you probably already know, is the the control or mastering of the life force energy, or prana.

Swami Sivananda says it best in his publication on, the science of Pranayama when he says,

The Prana may be defined as the finest vital force in everything which becomes visible on the physical plane as motion and action and on the mental plane as thought. The word Pranayama, therefore, means the restraint of vital energies.

The control of this force is what is aimed at by the Yogins by means of Pranayama. He who conquers this, is not only the conqueror of his own existence on the physical and mental plane, but the conqueror of the whole world. For, the Prana is the very essence of cosmic life

All physical forces, all mental forces come under the category 'Prana'. It is force on every plane of being, from the highest to the lowest.

The Yogi who becomes an expert in the knowledge of this secret, will have no fear from any power, because he has mastery over all the manifestations of powers in the universe.

Now let's take a look at how pranayama can be useful from an Ayurvedic perspective.

To begin with, the act of conscious breathing has a direct effect on the mind and body, therefore conscious breathing has a direct effect on the elemental composition, and on the doshas of each one of us as well.

So pranayama can be use to modify the current state of the doshas. Because of this it is important to understand the natural qualities of each form of breath and even more important to have the right intention while practicing each technique. This is due to the



fact that intention can change the effects of a specific pranayama regardless of its natural qualities.

So, why is it important to understand your doshic imbalances in relating to Pranayama practice?

Well, generally speaking Pranayama can purify nadis, or energy channels as well as have a calming effect on the mind which with time will eventually take you to a meditative state. But when a person is in a certain state or their doshas are out of balance, the practice of certain pranayamas can either bring balance to the system or take it even more out of balance. So it's important to first know and understand our dosha and even more important to begin to understand our current state of imbalances and what practices are either bringing balance, or a state of imbalance.

It is also important to remember and understand that at first we want to keep it as simple as possible. Some of the most powerful pranayama are the most simple and basic ones.

Now, we are going to talk about the effect of certain pranayama and how they interact with the doshas. But always remember that all pranayama can be affected by the intention of the practitioner, the mind set of the practitioner and the result and effects can also be affected by the rhythm and amount of repetitions we do.

There is not a rule that says that certain body types should not practice any pranayam, this apply more to current conditions, like heart conditions or any other strong imbalances.

Now let's take a look at some of the basic pranayamas in detail.

Ujjayi for example has many benefits. As you may already know the many benefits of Ujjayi are that it reduces mucus in the throat, Ujjayi builds the digestive fire, and purifies the nadis. It also aerates the lungs, decreases phlegm, and tones the nervous system.

Because Ujjayi has a strong affinity to raise the elements of Air & Space in the constitution - it is a wonderful breath to be practiced by those who are mostly Earth & Water elements or Kapha Dosha.

Because Ujjayi breath raises the elements of Air & Space - does this mean that those of with a Vata predominant constitution should not practice Ujjayi? No! But it does mean that it should be practiced with awareness, in moderation, and with the intention of grounding, steadying, and stabilizing the mind.

Now let's look at another well know Pranayam, Anulom Vilom. This is the best pranayama practice for individuals of vata constitution as it is gentle and creates calm state of mind. It is a grounding breath and in healthy individuals it pacifies vata and is neutral to pitta and kapha.



For Vata Imbalances - because Vata is predominantly Air and Space we want to ground, calm and focus the mind. So the best recommendation is to practice Alternate Nostril Breathing with a grounded focus or intention while breathing in through the left nostril - retaining the breath - and breathing out through the right nostril, and alternating sides with equal breaths. This has a calming effect on the mind and is especially great for those who have an overactive Vata mind to practice everyday.

For Pitta Imbalances you can use the same breath, but this time breathing in through the Left Nostril and out through the right will produce a cooling effect on the body and mind. For those with too much Fire element practicing Left nostril breathing will have a calming & cooling effect both in the body and in the mind as well.

And for Kapha Imbalances you can also use the same breath. However this time, breathing in through the Right Nostril and out through the Left which will produce a warming & energizing effect on the body & mind. When practiced with the intention of invigorating the body & mind this will help those with those sluggish Kapha systems.

So you see - the same breath - when practiced slightly differently, with slightly different focus or intention has a wildly different effect on the body and the mind.

It important to remember that though Anulom Vilom can be practiced many different ways, in its basic form is a tri doshic breath, meaning that it is great for all doshas, or all constitution.

Now, let's look at another breath, Bhramari.

Bhramari lists many physical benefits. For one, it is beneficial in the treatment of insomnia and it is a cooling breath.

Because Bhramari is a cooling breath, it can aggravate Vata & Kapha doshas when it is practiced in excess. Of course - because of its natural cooling effects, it is most beneficial to those Kapha individuals.

Does this mean that persons of Vata or Kapha constitution should not practice Bhramari? No! What it does mean is that we need to design our practice with awareness to the effects that each practice is having on our physical bodies, our Ayurvedic constitution and our minds.

When we know that we are always cold, we have cold hands, cold feet and coldness in the joints. When the digestive system is cold, and we have too much Air & Space elements in our body - we would want to practice those pranayamas that are going to benefit us most - or warming, calming pranayama exercises.

When we are unaware of the Ayurvedic effects of pranayama on our practice and on our state of mind - we can further aggravate our imbalances.



When Pitta is out of balance - we want to avoid heating breaths such as Kapalbhati, Ujjayi, Bhastrika or any other heating, active breath.

However, those same heating pranayama, Kapalbhati, Ujjayi, Bhastrika, or any other warming breath will be wonderful for those cold Kapha or Vata individuals.

Any pranayama that is adding too much Air or Space elements - creating a sense of dizziness, or lightheadedness, will really aggravate Vata Dosha - but those same qualities will be very beneficial to Kapha - who will do really well with those energizing breaths.

So to recap, let's take a look at which pranayams are more beneficial for each of the doshas.

To balance Vata Dosha, or those qualities of cold, light, air & space, practice warming, grounding, balancing, stabilizing breaths, such as, Bhramari and anulom vilom or any Calming and heating breath..

To balance the light, dry and hot qualities of Fire in Pitta Dosha, practice cooling, calming breaths such as Sitali, right nostril breath or any cooling breath with a calm and focused intention.

To balance the cool and heavy qualities of Kapha Dosha, practice warming, energizing breaths such as, Ujjayi breath. Bhastrika, kapalabhati or any heating and active breath.

Notice that some energizing pranayamas like Bhastrika have a calming effect in the mind, so they can be good for a active Vata mind when practiced with the correct intention. The important thing is to remember that it is not always the pranayam it self that is beneficial or not to a specific dosha, is the intention, intensity and quantity of the practice.

For example a pitta practicing 5 rounds of 60 repetitions of Kapalbhati with no breaks and with the intention and mind put in generating agni or fire will end up with a very different result than a Kapha doing the same practice. But the same pitta could practice 3 rounds of 30 repetitions taking breaks in between rounds and with a mind set of moving the prana or vayus in very specific ways, and get a different effect.

Don't mistake this statement, all pranayams have a very specific result, but that result can be decreased or increased by the practitioner, their intention and their method of practicing it.

More than memorizing the indications of each pranayam, I recommend that you begin to recognize the Ayurveda & dosha qualities in them. In most of cases by doing that, you will eventually figure out what their specific action is and therefore how do they affect the doshas.



Begin to think of each pranayama as heating or cooling, calming or energizing. Then you will begin to see the dosha affinity for each breath.

So to summarize,

All pranayama are done to increase prana in the system.

All pranayams are beneficial for all doshas, but they all need to be practiced accordingly to the personal constitution and to the current imbalances.

There is not a general prescription, as is with everything in Ayurveda, each has to be made for the individual, and for the moment and time of life.

Closing

Remember the best way to learn, is to practice the pranayama and to observe their effects. That's the best way to understand each of them. Remember Yoga is a practical science, so reading about this will not help you understand how pranayam affects your unique body & mind type. Practice will and practice with awareness!

Now it's time for you to discover what pranayama practice will be most beneficial for you. So go ahead and take a look inside your lesson module for today's workbook and discover your perfect for you pranayama practice.

When you are done, go ahead and share your findings inside the Facebook group, where I will be to answer any questions you have.

Thanks for listening! And I will see you when we talk about Ayurveda and your Meditation practice!

