



Proper Breathing

The Art of Controlling Prana

Taught by Andy B Allen

Proper breathing in Yoga is regarded as the art of harvest, control and use of Prana, also known as Pranayama, but what is Prana?

Prana is a term that originates from Sanskrit. It refers to the universal life force that permeates all living and non living organisms, from the tiniest microorganisms to the most complex organisms like humans to a rock. Prana is often described as the energy that flows within and around us. Prana is life!

Pranayama is the art of practice of utilising that prana. first by harvesting it or collecting it and then by containing it and using it.

Full Yogic Breath

Dirga Swasam Pranayama

It is the foundation of all breathing techniques as it teaches us how to properly utilise our full lung capacity and space.

It is also known as the three part breath involving the lower (stomach) area, the middle (ribcage) area and the upper (thoracic) area.



Full Yogic Breath

Practice

- One constant and full inhalation involving all three parts.
- Start on the lower side, end in upper side.
- Exhale completely emptying the lungs.
- Perform a small contraction bringing the the navel in towards the spine.
- Then relax the abdomen and inhale again repeating the process



Recommendations for the Practice

Dirga Pranayama

- Repeat 14 to 28 times, always practice it at the beginning of the pranayama practice
- It can also be done at the beginning and end of Asana practice
- At the beginning use a 1-1 ratio, later move to 1-2 ratio



Alternate Nostril Breathing

Nadi Shodhana

Alternate nostril breathing is one of if not the most important breathing technique in Yoga. Mentioned by almost every text that talks about pranayama, also said to be absolutely necessary to begin the practice of Yoga since it will remove impurities and open the energy channels (nadis) allowing energy or prana to flow through them. Without this process the natural blockages that exist in the system will not allow prana to flow and therefor yoga will not happen, in other words, the results will be at the most temporary and without much effect or benefit.



Alternate Nostril Breathing

Practice

- Always start with a complete exhalation.
- Inhale deep through the left nostril while covering the right nostril with thumb.
- Cover left nostril with ring finger and then exhale complete through right.
- To finish the session always finish exhaling through the left nostril and follow with a deep inhalation through both nostrils and hold the breath for as long as comfortably possible.
- Start with 3 to 5 minutes of continuous practice, add 2-3 minutes per week until reaching about 25 minutes
- Start with 1-1 ratio, then 1-1-1 or 2-1-2 and then 1-1-1-1 or 1-1-2-1 eventually move to 1-4-2-2, the final goal is 1-4-2-2

Recommendations for the Practice

Nadi Shodhana

- Make sure the breath is always steady, calm and without jittering, this is what tells you that you are ready to move up to the next more challenging ratio.
- Kevala Kumbhaka or spontaneous retention of breath is the final goal of pranayama and of the spiritual path as it activates the spiritual energy. To reduce to amount of breaths until breath cessation. But Kevala Kumbhaka can not be forced, it will happen naturally and only after prior preparation and proficiency in Yamas and Niyamas and the mastery of at least one asana as they naturally prepare you for pranayama

Note: Full cessation of breath is not what actually happens, but rather a breathing pattern that is so subtle that it is almost imperceptible.



Practice

- Full Yogic Breath; practice three to four times a day, with or without other practices 14 to 28 cycles, at least 10 counts on the inhalation and 10 to 20 on the exhalation depending on capabilities.
- Alternate nostril breathing; practice 2 to 4 times a day, ratio depend on your level of expertise. If you feel out of breath or feel the need to rest during practice it most likely means you are pushing too much and increasing ratio too fast.

Note: Always practice on an empty stomach.

