

Chapter 4.

Pranayama & Other Practices

Pracchardana vidharanabyam va pranasya.

Or that calm is retained by controlling the breath. *PYS 1.34*

Pranayama

What Is Pranayama?*

Tasmin sati svasaprasvasayor-gativicchedah pranayamah—“That [firm posture] being acquired, the movements of inhalation and exhalation should be controlled. This is pranayama.” - YS 2.49

‘Svasa’ means inspiratory breath. ‘Prasvasa’ means expiratory breath. You can take up the practice of Pranayama after you have gained steadiness in your Asana (seat). If you can sit for 3 hours in one Asana, continuously at one stretch, you have gained mastery over the Asana. If you are able to sit from half to one hour even, you can take up the practice of Pranayama. **You can hardly make any spiritual progress without the practice of Pranayama.**

The energy in the body is Prana. By controlling the motion of the lungs or respiratory organs, we can control the Prana that is vibrating inside. By control of Prana, the mind can be easily controlled, because the mind is fastened to the Prana, like the bird to the string. Just as the bird that is tied to a post by a string, after flying here and there, finds its resting place in the post, so also this mind-bird after running hither and thither, in various sensual objects, finds its resting place during deep sleep in the Prana.

Control of Breath

The first important step is to master the Asana of posture or to control the body. The next exercise is Pranayama. Correct posture is indispensably requisite for the successful practice of Pranayama. An easy comfortable posture is Asana. That pose is the best which continues to be comfortable for the greatest length of time. Chest, neck, and head must be in one vertical line. You should not bend the body either forwards or laterally, i.e., either on the right or left side. You should not sit crooked. You should not allow the body to collapse. You must not bend the body either forwards or backwards. By regular practice the mastery over the pose will come by itself. In both. Pranayama can also be practised by sitting in the chair erect.

In the Bhagavad-Gita, the Immortal Song of Lord Krishna, you will find a beautiful description of seat and pose: “In a pure secret place by himself established in a fixed seat of his own, neither too high nor too low, with cloth, black antelope-skin and Kusa grass one over the other, there, making the mind one-pointed, with thought and the functions of the senses controlled, steady on his seat, he should practise Yoga for the purification of the Self, holding the body, head and neck erect, firm, gazing steadily at the tip of the nose without looking around” (Ch. VI—10,11, & 12).

Pranayama is the control of the Prana and the vital forces of the body. It is regulation of the breath. This is the most important step. The aim of Pranayama is the control of Prana.



Pranayama begins with the regulation of the breath for having control over the life-currents or inner vital force. In other words, Pranayama is the perfect control of the life-currents through control of breath. Breath is external manifestation of the gross Prana. A correct habit of breathing must be established by the regular practice of Pranayama. In ordinary worldly persons the breathing is irregular.

If you can control the Prana you can completely control all the forces of the Universe, mental and physical. The Yogi can also control the Omnipresent manifesting power out of which all energies take their origin, whether concerning magnetism, electricity, gravitation, cohesion, nerve-currents, vital forces or thought-vibrations, in fact the total forces of the Universe, physical and mental.

If one controls the breath or Prana, the mind also is controlled. He who has controlled his mind has also controlled his breath. If one is suspended, the other is also suspended. If the mind and Prana are both controlled one gets liberation from the round of births and deaths and attains immortality. There is intimate connection between the mind, Prana and semen. If one controls the seminal energy, the mind and Prana are also controlled. He who has controlled his seminal energy has also controlled his Prana and mind.

He who practices Pranayama will have good appetite, cheerfulness, handsome figure, good strength, courage, enthusiasm, a high standard of health, vigour and vitality and good concentration of mind. Pranayama is quite suitable for the Westerners also. A Yogi measures the span of his life not by the number of years but by the number of his breaths. You can take in a certain amount of energy or Prana from the atmospheric air along with each breath. Vital capacity is the capacity shown by the largest quantity of air a man can inhale after the deepest possible exhalation. A man takes fifteen breaths in a minute. The total number of breaths comes to 21,600 times per day.

***source: <https://www.dlshq.org/index.html>**

Pranayama Exercises

1. Deep Breathing Exercise

Each deep breathing consists of a very full inhalation, through the nose and a deep, steady exhalation also, through the nose.

Inhale slowly as much as you can do. Exhale slowly as much as you can do.

During inhalation, observe the following rules:

1. Stand up. Place the hands on the hips, the elbows will be out and not forced backward. Stand at ease.
2. Lengthen the chest straight upwards. Press the hip bones with the hands in downward direction. A vacuum will be formed by this act and the air will rush in of its own accord.
3. Keep the nostrils wide open. Do not use the nose as a suction pump. It should serve as a passive passage for both the inhaled and the exhaled air. Do not make any sound when you inhale and exhale. Remember that correct breathing is noiseless.
4. Stretch the whole upper part of the trunk.
5. Do not arch the upper chest into a cramped position. Keep the abdomen naturally relaxed.
6. Do not bend the head far backwards. Do not draw the abdomen inwards. Do not force the shoulders back. Lift the shoulders up.

During the exhalation observe the following rules carefully:

1. Allow the ribs and the whole upper part of the trunk to sink down gradually.
2. Draw the lower ribs and abdomen upwards—slowly.
3. Do not bend the body too much forward. Arching of the chest should be avoided. Keep the head, neck and trunk in a straight line. Contract the chest. Do not breathe the air out through the mouth. Exhale very, very slowly without producing any noise.
4. Expiration simply takes place by relaxing the inspiratory muscles. The chest falls down by its own weight and expels the air out through the nose.
5. In the beginning, do not retain the breath after inhalation. When the process of inhalation is over begin exhalation at once. When you have sufficiently advanced in your practice, you can slowly retain the breath from five seconds to one minute according to your capacity.



6. When one round of three deep breathings is over, you can take a little rest, 'Respiratory pause'—by taking a few normal breaths. Then start the second round. During the pause, stand still in a comfortable position with hands on hips. The number of rounds can be fixed according to the capacity of the practitioner. Do 3 or 4 rounds and increase one round every week. Deep breathing is only a variety of Pranayama.

2. "Alternate Nostril Preparatory Breathing"

Sit on Padmasana. Close your eyes. Concentrate on Trikuti (the space between the two eye-brows). Close the right nostril with your right thumb. Inhale slowly through the left nostril as long as you can do it with comfort. Then exhale very very slowly through the same nostril. Do twelve times. This is one round.

Then inhale through the right nostril by closing the left nostril with your right ring and little fingers and exhale very slowly through the same nostril. Do twelve times. This is one round.

Do not make any sound during inhalation and exhalation. Repeat your Ishta Mantra during the practice. In the second week of practice, do two rounds, in the third week, three rounds. Take rest for two minutes when one round is over. If you take a few normal breaths, when one round is over, that will give you sufficient rest and you will be fresh for the next round. There is no Kumbhaka in this exercise. You can increase the number of rounds according to your strength and capacity.

3. "Long, Deep Breathing"

Inhale through both the nostrils slowly and gently. Do not retain the breath. Then exhale slowly. Do 12 times. This will constitute one round. You can do 2 or 3 rounds according to your capacity and strength and time at your disposal.

4. (Nadi Shodhana Pranayama) - "Alternate Nostril Breathing"

Sit on your Asana. Close the right nostril with your right thumb. Then inhale slowly through your left nostril. Close the left nostril with your right ring and little fingers and open the right nostril by removing the right thumb. Exhale very slowly through the right nostril. Then draw the air through the right nostril as long as you can do it with comfort and exhale through the left nostril by removing the right ring and little fingers. There is no Kumbhaka in this Pranayama. Repeat the process 12 times. This will constitute one round.

5. (Nadi Shodhana Pranayama with Kumbhaka) "Alternate Nostril Breathing with Retention"

Meditate that the single letter, the Supreme light—Pranava or OM—is the origin or source of the three letters A, U and M. Inhale the air through Ida or left nostril for the space of 16 Matras (seconds), meditate on the letter 'A' during that time; retain the air for the space of 64 Matras, meditate on the letter 'U' during the time; exhale through the right nostril for the space of 32 Matras and meditate on the letter 'M' during that time. Practise this again and again in the above order. Begin with 2 or 3 times and gradually increase the number to 20 or 30 times according to your capacity and strength. To begin with, keep the ratio 1:4:2; [next 2:8:4; next 3:12:16; then 4:16:8; and so on] gradually increase the ratio to 16:64:32.

NOTE: *Sri Dharma Mittra says that 3:12:16 and 4:16:8 are the best ratios for this type of breathing.*

6. Sukha Purvaka – "Easy Comfortable Breathing"

Sit on Padmasana or Siddhasana in your meditation room, before the picture of your Ishta Devata (guiding deity). Close the right nostril with the right thumb. Draw in the air very, very slowly through the left nostril. Then close the left nostril also with little and ring fingers of the right hand. Retain the air as long as you can comfortably do. Then exhale very, very slowly through the nostril after removing the thumb. Now half the process is over. Then draw air through the right nostril. Retain the air as before and exhale it very, very slowly through the left nostril. All these six processes constitute one Pranayama. Do 20 in the morning and 20 in the evening. Gradually increase the number. Have a Bhava (mental attitude) that all the Daivi Sampat (divine qualities), e.g., mercy, love, forgiveness, Santi, joy, etc., are entering into your system along with the inspired air and all Asuri Sampat (devilish qualities) such as lust, anger, greed, etc., are being thrown out along with the expired air. Repeat OM or Gayatri mentally during Puraka, Kumbhaka and Rechaka. Hard-working Sadhakas can do 320 Kumbhakas daily in four sittings at the rate of 80 in each sitting.

This Pranayama removes all diseases, purifies the Nadis, steadies the mind in concentration, improves digestion, increases the digestive fire and appetite, helps to maintain Brahmacharya and awakens the Kundalini that is sleeping at the Muladhara Chakra. Purification of Nadis will set in rapidly. You will have levitation (rising above the ground) also.

(Note: Various Mantras and their benefits are described in my book "Japa Yoga".)

7. Sama Vritti Pranayama – “Rhythmical Breathing” or “Same-Fluctuation Breath”

The breathing in men and women is very irregular. In exhalation the Prana goes out 16 digits and in inhalation only 12 digits, thus losing 4 digits. But if you inhale for 16 digits as in exhalation then you will have rhythmical breathing. Then the power Kundalini will be roused. By the practice of rhythmical breathing you will enjoy real good rest. You can control the respiratory centre that is situated in medulla oblongata and other nerves also, because the centre of respiration has a sort of controlling effect on other nerves. He who has calm nerves, has a calm mind also.

If the units of exhalation and inhalation are the same, you will have rhythmical breathing. If you inhale till you count 6 OM's, exhale also till you count 6 OM's. This is breathing in and out in a measured manner. This will harmonise the whole system. This will harmonise the physical body, mind, Indriyas and will soothe the tired nerves. You will experience full repose and calmness. All the bubbling emotions will subside and the surging impulses will calm down.

There is another variety of modification of rhythmic breathing. Inhale slowly through both nostrils for 4 OM's; retain the breath for 8 OM's (internal Kumbhaka); exhale slowly through both nostrils for 4 OM's; and retain the breath outside (external Kumbhaka) for 8 OM's.

Repeat the above process a number of times according to your strength and capacity. You can gradually increase the duration of inhalation and exhalation after some practice of 8 OM's and the period between breaths to 16 OM's. But never try to increase the duration until you are sure that you have power and strength to do so. You must experience joy and pleasure in doing the same. You should not feel any undue strain. Pay considerable attention to keep up the rhythm. Remember that the rhythm is more important than the length of breath. You must feel the rhythm throughout your whole body. Practice will make you perfect. Patience and perseverance are needed.

8. Ujjayi & Purna Ujjayi Pranayama – “Victorious & Complete Victorious Breath”

Sit in Padmasana or Siddhasana. Close the mouth. Inhale slowly through both the nostrils in a smooth, uniform manner till the breath fills the space from the throat to the heart.

Retain the breath as long as you can do it comfortably and then exhale slowly through the left nostril by closing the right nostril with your right thumb. Expand the chest when you inhale. During inhalation a peculiar sound is produced owing to the partial closing of glottis. The sound produced during inhalation should be of a mild and uniform pitch. It should be continuous also.

This Kumbhaka may be practised even when walking or standing. Instead of exhaling through the left nostril, you can exhale slowly through both nostrils.

This removes the heat in the head. The practitioner becomes very beautiful. The gastric fire is increased. It removes all the evils arising in the body and the Dhatus and cures Jalodara (dropsy of the belly or ascites). It removes phlegm in the throat, Asthma, consumption and all sorts of pulmonary diseases are cured. All diseases that arise from deficient inhalation of oxygen, and diseases of the heart are cured. All works are accomplished by Ujjayi Pranayama. The practitioner is never attacked by diseases of phlegm, nerves, dyspepsia, dysentery, enlarged spleen, consumption, cough or fever. Perform Ujjayi to destroy decay and death.

9. Sitali Pranayama – “Cooling Breath”

Protrude the tongue a little away from the lips. Fold the tongue like a tube. Draw in the air through the mouth with the hissing sound Si. Retain the breath as long as you can hold on with comfort. Then exhale slowly through both nostrils. Practise this daily again and again in the morning from 15 to 30 times. You can do this either on Padmasana, Siddhasana, Vajrasana or even when you stand or walk.

This Pranayama purifies the blood. It quenches thirst and appeases hunger. It cools the system. It destroys Gulma (chronic dyspepsia), Pleeha, inflammation of various chronic diseases, fever, consumption, indigestion, bilious disorders, phlegm, the bad effects of poison, snake-bite, etc. When you are caught up in a jungle or any place where you cannot get water, if you feel thirsty, practise this Pranayama. You will be at once relieved of thirst. He who practises this Pranayama regularly, will not be affected by the bite of serpents and scorpions. Sitali Kumbhaka is an imitation of the respiration of a serpent. The practitioner gets the power of casting his skin and enduring the privation of air, water and food. He becomes a proof against all sorts of inflammations and fever.

10. Kapalabhati Pranayama – “Skull-Shining Breath”

‘Kapala’ is a Sanskrit word; it means skull. ‘Bhati’ means to shine. The term ‘Kapalabhati’ means an exercise that makes the skull shine. This Kriya cleanses the skull. So this is taken as one of the Shat-Karmas (six cleansing processes in Hatha Yoga).

Sit on Padmasana. Keep the hands on knees. Close the eyes. Perform Puraka and Rechaka rapidly. This should be practised vigorously. One will get perspiration profusely. This is a good form of exercise. Those who are well-versed in Kapalabhati, can do Bhastrika very easily. There is no Kumbhaka in this Pranayama. Rechaka plays a prominent part. Puraka is mild, slow and long (Dirgha). But the Rechaka should be done quickly and forcibly by contracting the abdominal muscles with a backward push. When you do Puraka, release the abdominal muscles. Some

people naturally make a curve of the spine and bend their heads also. This is not desirable. The head and the trunk should be erect. Sudden expulsions of breath follow one another as in Bhastrika. To start with, you can have one expulsion per second. Gradually you can have two expulsions per second. To begin with do one round in the morning consisting of 10 expulsions only. In the second week, do one round in the evening. In the third week, do two rounds in the morning and two rounds in the evening. Thus every week, gradually and cautiously increase 10 expulsions to each round till you get 120 expulsions for each round.

It cleanses the respiratory system and the nasal passages. It removes the spasm in bronchial tubes. Consequently, Asthma is relieved and also cured in course of time. The apices of the lungs get proper oxygenation. Thereby they cannot afford favourable nidus (breeding grounds) for tubercle bacilli. Consumption is cured by this practice. Lungs are considerably developed. Carbon dioxide is eliminated in a large scale. Impurities of the blood are thrown out. Tissues and cells absorb a large quantity of oxygen. The practitioner keeps up good health. Heart functions properly. The circulatory and respiratory systems are toned to a considerable degree.

11. Bhastrika Pranayama – “Bellows Breath”

In Sanskrit Bhastrika means ‘bellows’. Rapid succession of forcible expulsion is a characteristic feature of Bhastrika. Just as a blacksmith blows his bellows rapidly, so also you should move your breath rapidly.

Sit on Padmasana. Keep the body, neck and head erect. Close the mouth. Next, inhale and exhale quickly ten times like the bellows of the blacksmith. Constantly dilate and contract. When you practise this Pranayama a hissing sound is produced. The practitioner should start with rapid expulsions of breath following one another in rapid succession. When the required number of expulsions, say ten for a round, is finished, the final expulsion is followed by a deepest possible inhalation. The breath is suspended as long as it could be done with comfort. Then deepest possible exhalation is done very slowly. The end of this deep exhalation completes one round of Bhastrika. Rest a while after one round is over by taking a few normal breaths. This will give you relief and make you fit for starting the second round. Do three rounds daily in the morning. You can do another three rounds in the evening also. Busy people who find it difficult to do three rounds of Bhastrika can do one round at least. This also will keep them quite fit.

Bhastrika is a powerful exercise. A combination of Kapalabhati and Ujjayi makes up Bhastrika. Practise Kapalabhati and Ujjayi to start with. Then you will find it very easy to do Bhastrika.

Some prolong the practice till they get tired. You will get perspiration profusely. If you experience any giddiness stop the practice and take a few normal breaths. Continue the practice

after the giddiness has vanished. Bhastrika can be done both in the morning and evening in winter. In summer do it in the morning only during cool hours.

Bhastrika relieves inflammation of the throat, increases gastric fire, destroys phlegm, removes diseases of the nose and chest and eradicates asthma, consumption, etc. It gives good appetite. It breaks the three Granthis or knots viz., Brahma Granthi, Vishnu Granthi and Rudra Granthi. It destroys phlegm which is the bolt or obstacle to the door at the mouth of Brahma Nadi (Sushumna). It enables one to know the Kundalini. It removes all diseases which arise from excess of wind, bile and phlegm. It gives warmth to the body. When you have no sufficient warm clothing in a cool region to protect yourself from cold, practise this Pranayama and you will get sufficient warmth in the body quickly. It purifies the Nadis considerably. It is the most beneficial of all Kumbhakas. Bhastrika Kumbhaka should be specially practised as it enables the Prana to break through the three Granthis or knots that are firmly located in the Sushumna. It awakens the Kundalini quickly. The practitioner will never suffer from any disease. He will always be healthy.

The number of exhalations or rounds is determined by the strength and capacity of the practitioner. You must not go to extremes. Some students do six rounds. Some do twelve also.

You can practise Bhastrika in the following manner. There is some slight change in the end. Having inhaled and exhaled quickly twenty times, inhale through the right nostril, retain the breath as long as you can do it comfortably and then exhale through the left nostril. Then inhale through the left nostril, retain the breath as before and then exhale through the right nostril.

Repeat OM mentally with Bhava and meaning throughout the practice.

There are some varieties of Bhastrika wherein one nostril only is used for breathing purposes and in another variety the alternate nostrils are used for inhalation and exhalation.

Those who wish to do Bhastrika for a long time in an intense manner should live on Khichdi, and take an enema or do Bhasti in the morning before starting the practice.

12. Bhrahmari Pranayama – “Buzzing Breath”

Sit on Padmasana or Siddhasana. Inhale rapidly through both nostrils; exhale rapidly through both nostrils, making the humming sound of Bhramara, the bee.

You can carry the process till the body is bathed in perspiration. In the end inhale through both nostrils, retain the breath as long as you can do it comfortably and then exhale slowly through both nostrils. The joy which the practitioner gets in making the Kumbhaka is unlimited and indescribable. In the beginning, heat of the body is increased as the circulation of blood is

quicken. In the end the body-heat is decreased by perspiration. By success in this Bhramari Kumbhaka the Yogic student gets success in Samadhi.

Shortened Version: Pranayama Quick Reference Guide

Pranayama Exercise No. 1 – “Alternate Nostril Preparatory Breath”

Technique: Inhale Left; Exhale Left; Repeat 12 times. One round complete.
Inhale Right; Exhale Right; Repeat 12 times. 2nd round complete.

Notes: No breath retention. Rest for 2 minutes after each round. Start with 1 round left and 1 round right. Add another round as you feel stronger.

Pranayama Exercise No. 2 – “Long, Deep Breathing”

Technique: Inhale through both nostrils slowly; Exhale through both nostrils slowly; Repeat 12 times. One round complete.

Notes: Start with 1 round. Build up to 2 or 3 rounds. Rest between rounds.

***IMPORTANT: FOR ALL ALTERNATE NOSTRIL PRACTICES:

Use the right hand to close the nose. Start with Right hand in Vishnu Mudra (pictured to the right). Thumb goes to Right Nostril; Ring Finger (#4) goes to Left Nostril.



Rest the left hand in **Jnana Mudra** (pictured to the right) on your lap or left thigh. Palm up or down is fine.



Pranayama Exercise No. 3 (Nadi Shodhana Pranayama) – “Alternate Nostril Breath”

Technique: Inhale Left comfortably; Exhale Right comfortably; Inhale Right comfortably; Exhale Left comfortably. This is one round.

Notes: Practice daily. Start with 12 rounds. Add 1 round a day, as appropriate. Build up to 30 minutes.

Pranayama Exercise No. 4 (Nadi-Shodhana with Kumbhaka) – "Alternate Nostril Breath with Retention"

Technique: Using the ratio 1:4:8. (*start with 3:12:6, build to 4:16:8*). 1 count = 1 mental OM. Inhale Left 3; Hold 12; Out Right 6; Inhale Right 3; Hold 12; Out Left 6. This is one round.

OR

Inhale Left 4; Hold 16; Out Right 8; Inhale Right 4; Hold 16; Out Left 8. This is one round.

Notes: Practice daily. Start with 12 rounds. Add 1 round a day, as appropriate. Build up to 30 minutes.

Sukha Purvaka Pranayama – "Easy Comfortable Breath"

Technique: Inhale Left; Retain breath (Kumbhaka) for a comfortable length of time; Exhale Right; Inhale Right; Retain the breath comfortably; Exhale Left. This is one round.

Notes: Practice daily. Start with 12 rounds. Add 1 round a day, as appropriate. Build up to 30 minutes.

Sama Vritti Pranayama – "Rhythmical Breathing" or "Same-Fluctuation Breath"

Technique: Inhale both nostrils for 6 counts (OMs); Exhale both nostrils for 6 counts.

Notes: Could do inhale 6; hold 6; exhale 6; hold breath out 6.



Ujjayi – "Victorious Breath"

Technique: Inhale both nostrils while closing the back of the throat with the glottis – making a smooth, soft sound in the throat – filling the chest with air; Hold about 2 seconds; Exhale through both nostrils while closing the back of throat with the glottis. This is one round.

Notes: Start with 12 rounds.

Purna Ujjayi – "Complete Victorious Breath"



Technique: Inhale both nostrils while closing the back of the throat with the glottis; Retain the breath comfortably, using Mulabandha and Jalandhara Bandha, as long as you can; Using Vishnu mudra on the right hand – close right nostril and Exhale (with Ujjayi sound) through Left Nostril.

Sitali Pranayama – “Cooling Breath”

Technique: Inhale quickly through curled tongue (picture to the right); Retain breath (no locks) and concentrate on coolness on the tongue pressing against upper palate; Exhale through both nostrils.



Notes: If tongue cannot curl, you may press the tip of the tongue against the upper palate and take the breath on either side of the tongue and through the teeth.

Kapalabhati Pranayama – “Skull-Shining Breath”

Technique: Sharp pumps of the abdomen to expel air out of the lungs with an emphasis on the exhale; Inhale happens passively.

Notes: Start with 40 rounds. Build up to 60, 80, maybe 100 or 108. After completing 1 round (e.g. 40 pumps), exhale completely; then inhale through both nostrils and hold the breath – engage Mula Bandha and Jalandhara Bandha and concentrate on Trikuti (3rd eye); then exhale through both nostrils.
- Complete 2 or 3 sets (with retention/locks/concentration at trikuti) after every set.

Bhastrika Pranayama – “Bellows Breath”

Technique: Fast inhale; Fast exhale – resembles a panting dog, only mouth is closed and breath is through nose. Belly is moving slightly. Using the lungs like bellows.

Notes: Complete the same hold/lock/concentration pattern as Kapalabhati (above) after 1 round (approx 30-60 seconds). Do 2-3 sets.

Bhrahmari Pranayama – “Buzzing Breath”

Technique: Plug the ears by closing ear flaps with index fingers (pictured right); Inhale through both nostrils; During



exhale make a buzzing sound like a humming bee. This is 1 round. (if you sweat, you are doing it correctly!)

Notes: Start with 3 rounds, build up to 9 rounds.

Ujjayi Pranayama during Asana

Excerpt: Erich Schiffmann's *Yoga & The Spirit And Practice of Moving Into Stillness*

Think of your body as a musical instrument, a wind instrument. Your breath accordingly is the wind through the instrument. As such it is the since most important aspect of your technique. Traditionally considered the primary carrier of prana—life force—your breathing originated deep inside you, radiates outward and then inward, providing a gentle and steady rhythm for movement, stretch and release. Sometimes you will breathe softly; other times with vigor, but the breathing itself will always be a central and governing focus. Proper breathing brings the poses to life, inspires every subtle shift and movement in every yoga posture and can help center your awareness in your conscious experience of the now.

The main type of breathing we do in yoga is called ujjayi (ooh – jai-yee). Ujjayi breathing, known as the victory breath, is characterized by an audibly hollow, deep soft sound coming from your throat.

The main idea is to coordinate your movements with your breathing. This brings a graceful and sensuous quality to your practice and turns each yoga session into a fluid and creative mediation. As you become skillful at this, the breath and movement will not longer feel distinct. You will experience them as one action, inseparably entwined. You will instinctively breathe as you move or stretch, and move or stretch as you breathe.

Certain movements are always done on inhale, others on exhale. The type of breath (inhale or exhale) deepens on what works most naturally on our body. Each specified movement should start with the initiation of the appropriate breath. Opening movements such as backbends and lifting arms are done on inhale. Folding or closing movements such as forward bends and lowering arms are done on exhale. For example, you raise your arms overhead on inhale and lower them on exhale. The movement, though, is initiated or inspired by the breath and is surrounded by the breath.

This pattern makes sense, for it is what happens naturally. When you expand or open there is more room so that air naturally enters; and when you fold or close, air is squeezed out. If you run short of breath before a particular movement is completed, stop moving, finish the



breathing cycle you are now on (exhale if you have just inhaled, inhale if you have just exhaled), and continue moving with the net appropriate phase of breath. In this way an inhaling movement such as arm raising is always done on inhale, even if it requires some exhales in between. Always move with the breath, and only move when you are breathing. One inhale plus one exhale equals a single breath.

Ujjayi – Triumphantly Uprising. *Prana uprising through sushumna nadi.*

- Mirror exercise
- Whisper
- Darth Vader breath
- Toning the epiglottis
- Ocean waves

Techniques: permit a pause to occur at the top of each inhalation, perform mulabandha, evenness, and steadiness

Instructions:

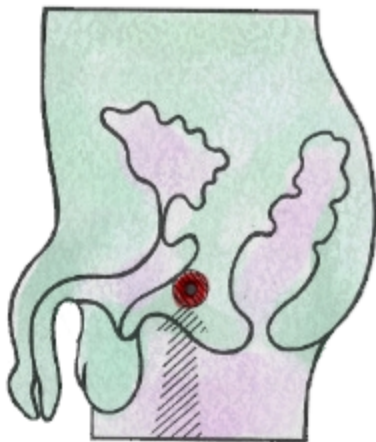
inhale -- tone lower abdomen and fill the torso with breath from base up to chest—belly stays toned as ribs lift and expand!

Exhale – maintain the lift in the spine and torso, release emptying the top to the bottom!

Bandha

The bandhas (locks) unite prana (upward-moving energy) and apana (downward-moving energy) at the naval region. They are often used during pranayama and asana to assist in moving energy within the body. Remember, where your mind goes, the prana goes. Thus, bandhas are also useful when coupled with concentration (typically at the 3rd eye or another chakra— your teacher will instruct you where to concentrate when holding a lock) because you can move energy to a specific point in the body. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita describe these locks.

Mula Bandha – “Root Lock”



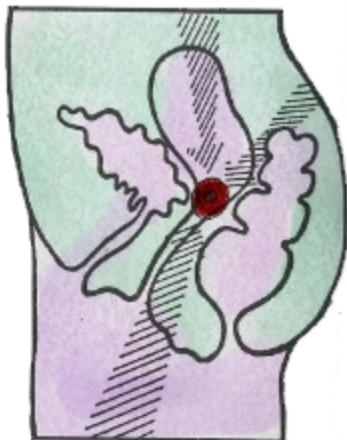
Mula Bandha

the root lock

Mula means 'root', 'origin', or 'foundation'. In human body, it is located in the perinium.

how-to

Contract the same muscles used in holding the urine mid-stream.



benefits

The bandha helps balance the sexual desires. It moves apana vayu or the downward wind (in the body) up to meet with prana vayu or the master wind creating a yogic state.

NOTE: Ashwini Mudra (often confused with mula bandha) - Contraction of the anal sphincter.

Uddiyana Bandha – “Flying-Up Lock”

Uddiyana Bandha

The abdominal lock

Uddiya means 'flying upward'.
It is said to be the best bandha.
It is "the elephant that kills the lion
named Death."



how-to

Pull the abdominal muscles in and up
after the complete exhalation and
before the inhalation.

benefits

It massages and tones the heart
muscles. It also moves the downward
energy in and up toward the chest.



Jalandhara Bandha – “Neck Lock”

Jalandhara Bandha

the throat lock



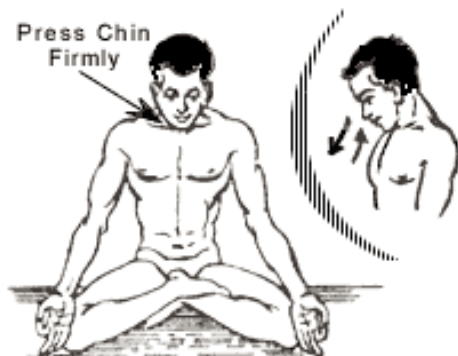
Jala means a net or a web. The bandha is the first bandha that a yogi should master

how-to

contract the throat and neck and bring the chin to the chest in the notch between the collar bones.

benefits

The bandha regulates the blood flow to the heart, the neck and head regions. It also guides the upward flow of energy down to fuse with the downward.



For more information on the Bandhas, check out these articles online:

- [Mula Bandha in Action](#) by Hillari Dowdle, Sequence by Tim Miller (PDF)
- [Upward Abdominal Lock](#) by Yoga Journal (PDF)
- [Jalandhara Bandha](#) by Yoga Journal (PDF)

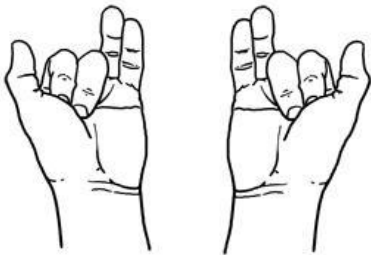
Mudra

A mudra is an energetic seal used in conjunction with pranayama and asana. Some mudras are done with the hands and some are done with the entire body. The Hatha Yoga Pradipika and Gheranda Samhita describe the mudras. A mudra is powerful and can change the energetic of a posture – so try and wait for guidance by your teacher on which mudras to use with which poses and breathing techniques. There are a variety of mudras to do in conjunction with the asana. Generally, use Jnana (Gyana) Mudra during all pranayama techniques unless instructed otherwise.

Jnana Mudra



Vishnu Mudra



Anjali Mudra



Kriya

The Shat Kriyas (Shat Karmas)– from the Hatha Yoga Pradipika

Shat Kriyas or Yogic cleansing processes are an integral part of yoga as they help eliminate accumulated toxins from the system. The body functions like a machine and like a machine it has to be continuously cleaned and maintained. It is this cleansing of toxins like mucus, gas, acid, sweat, urine and stool that improves its functioning. Kriyas also help prepare the body and condition it for the proper practice of yogasana and pranayama.

The objectives of the Kriyas are to:

- Cleanse the inner tracts - respiratory tract and digestive tract.
- Develop an inner awareness.
- Desensitize the possible hypersensitive reactions in the pathways (as in nasal allergy).
- Build the stamina and the forbearance capacity.

The six cleansing processes are Neti, Dhauti, Basti (Enema), Nauli, Kapal Bhati, and Trataka. These kriyas clean the eyes, respiratory system, food pipe and tone up abdominal viscera and the intestines. They also build up resistance to diseases, sharpen the mind and wash the colon. Apart from cleansing the system, as a whole, the kriyas also provide a massaging effect on the areas applied.

1. **Neti:** cleaning the nasal passages

Jala Neti: warm salt-water

Sutra Net: waxed thread or thin, soft rubber catheter

Dugdha Neti: milk

Ghrita Neti: ghee

2. **Dhauti:** cleansing the intestine

Jala Dhauti: warm water with salt (drink, then vomit) or warm water with lemon (drink to cleanse)

Vastra Dhauti: swallow/regurgitate fine piece of cloth

3. **Basti:** cleansing the colon

Jala Basti: warm water/salt-water in bum (through tube), apply ashwini mudra, then release



Colonic Irrigation: done by someone else!

Laghu Shankhprakashana: drink warm salt water, do a few asanas, then poop. Repeat until you poop clear water!

4. **Nauli**: cleansing the abdominal organs

Nauli Kriya: rolling abdominal muscles

Agnisara: pumping abdominal muscles

Uddhiyana Bandha: creating vacuum seal for abdominal viscera

5. **Kapalabhati**: cleansing frontal part of brain (skull shining) - also good for respiratory system and lungs

6. **Tratak**: cleansing the mind through eye gazing (flame, small dot, object)

DRISHTI:

“Drishti is the point of gaze or focus, yet it has little to do with our physical sight. The real ‘looking’ is directed internally. We may fix our physical sight upon an external object or a specific point on our body, yet truly the drishti is meant to direct our attention to the subtle aspects of our practice ... the breath and bandhas as well as the mind. Those of us with sight are easily distracted by our surroundings. Other students in the room, the clock on the wall, or myriad other forms may pull us away from the immediate concerns of practicing yoga with awareness. The drishti is a device designed to balance our internal and external practice.

“If you find the drishti to be too difficult, then I have a general rule of thumb which you can follow as an alternative whenever you feel the need. Let your gaze move in the direction of the stretch. As an example, if practicing a spinal twist to the right, your gaze will follow in that direction by looking over the right shoulder.

“Remember the main focus is to look inward. Create an internal checklist which you can scan in a millisecond when practicing. On this list you may have Breath, Bandhas, Flow and Equality of Opposition. Do you feel tension in particular areas of the body? Where is your awareness? Is it spread throughout the body? Are you relaxed? The list may go on but the idea is that the drishti is your microscope to examine that which may not be seen externally.”

The Nine Drishtis:

Nasagrai - tip of the nose
Ajna Chakra - third eye
Nabi chakra - navel
Hastagrai - hand
Padhayoragrai - toes
Parsva Drishti - far to the right
Parsva Drishti - far to the left (to the left and to the right sides)
Angustha ma dyai - thumbs
Urdhva - up

Each Asana has a drishti assigned to it. For example:

Virabhadrasana A - the thumbs

Parsvottanasana - the nose

Utthita Trikonasana - the hand

Janu Sirsasana - the toes

--- all above excerpted from David Swenson's Ashtanga Yoga: The Practice Manual

Additional Vinyasa Drishtis:

Eka Grada Drishti (solar connection, one place focused), Ananda Drishti (lunar connection - close eyes, go inward, then open eyes maintaining that inward connection), Ardha Drishti (half), Tehas Drishti (spark in the eye)