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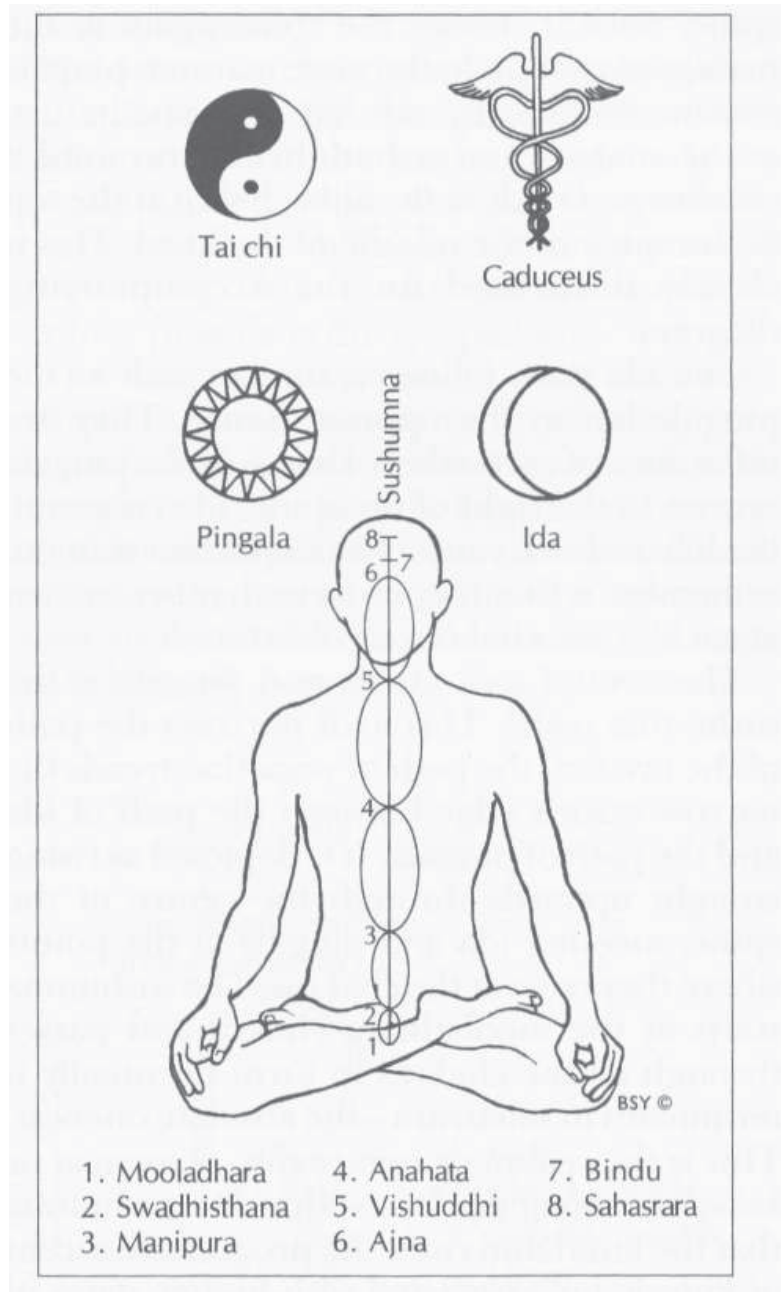
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HATHA YOGA by NICOLAS AMBROSETTI

# ABOUT PRANAYAMA

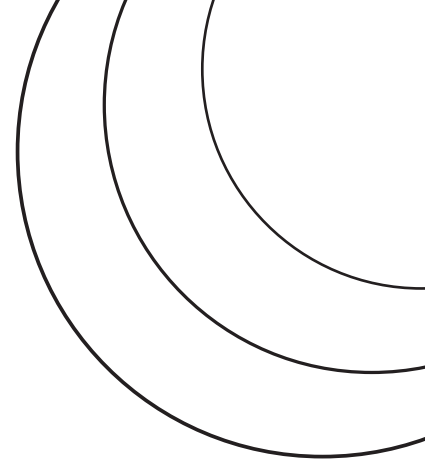
## a little summary



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# PRANA



Pranayama is generally defined as breath control. Although this interpretation may seem correct in view of the practices involved, it does not convey the full meaning of the term. The word pranayama is comprised of two roots: prana + ayama.

**Prana** means 'vital energy' or 'life force'. It is the force which exists in all things, whether animate or inanimate. Although closely related to the air we breathe, it is more subtle than air or oxygen. Therefore, pranayama should not be considered as mere breathing exercises aimed at introducing extra oxygen into the lungs. Pranayama utilises breathing to influence the flow of prana in the nadis or energy channels of the pranamayakosha or energy body.

**Yama** means 'control' and is used to denote various rules or codes of conduct. However, this is not the word which is joined to prana to form pranayama; the correct word is ayama which has far more implications than the word yama. Ayama is defined as 'extension' or 'expansion'. Thus, the word pranayama means 'extension or expansion of the dimension of prana'. The techniques of pranayama provide the method whereby the life force can be activated and regulated in order to go beyond one's normal boundaries or limitations and attain a higher state of vibratory energy.

# 4 ASPECTS OF BREATHING

In the pranayama practices there are four important aspects of breathing which are utilised. These are:

1. Pooraka or inhalation
2. Rechaka or exhalation
3. Antar kumbhaka or internal breath retention
4. Bahir kumbhaka or external breath retention.

The different practices of pranayama involve various techniques which utilise these four aspects of breathing. There is another mode of pranayama which is called kevala kumbhaka or spontaneous breath retention. This is an advanced stage of pranayama which occurs during high states of meditation. During this state, the lungs stop their activity and the respiration ceases. At this time, the veil which prevents one from seeing the subtle aspect of existence is lifted and a higher vision of reality is attained.

The most important part of pranayama is actually kumbhaka or breath retention. However, in order to perform kumbhaka successfully, there must be a gradual development of control over the function of respiration. Therefore, in the pranayama practices more emphasis is given to inhalation and exhalation at the beginning, in order to strengthen the lungs and balance the nervous and pranic systems in preparation for the practice of kumbhaka. These practices influence the flow of prana in the nadis, purifying, regulating and activating them, thereby inducing physical and mental stability.

# 5 KOSHAS & PRANAS



According to yogic physiology, the human framework is comprised of five bodies or sheaths, which account for the different aspects or dimensions of human existence. These five sheaths are known as:

1. Annamaya kosha, the food or material body
2. Manomaya kosha, the mental body
3. Pranamaya kosha, the bioplasmic or vital energy body
4. Vijñanamaya kosha, the psychic or higher mental body
5. Anandamaya kosha, the transcendental or bliss body.

Although these five sheaths function together to form an integral whole, the practices of pranayama work mainly with pranamaya kosha. The pranamaya kosha is made up of five major pranas which are collectively known as the pancha, or five

**Prana**, in this context, does not refer to cosmic prana but rather to just one part of the pranamaya kosha, governing the area between the larynx and the top of the diaphragm. It is associated with the organs of respiration and speech, and the gullet, together with the muscles and nerves that activate them. It is the force by which the breath is drawn inside.

**Apana** is located below the navel region and provides energy for the large intestine, kidneys, anus and genitals. It is concerned with the expulsion of waste from the body.

**Samana** is located between the heart and the navel. It activates and controls the digestive system: the liver, intestines, pancreas and stomach, and their secretions. Samana also activates the heart and circulatory system, and is responsible for the assimilation and distribution of nutrients.

**Udana** controls the area of the body above the neck, activating all the sensory receptors such as the eyes, nose and ears. Thought and consciousness of the outside world would be impossible without it. Udana also harmonises and activates the limbs and all their associated muscles, ligaments, nerves and joints, as well as being responsible for the erect posture of the body.

**Vyana** pervades the whole body, regulating and controlling all movement, and coordinating the other pranas. It acts as the reserve force for the other pranas.

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# NADIS

The Pranic energy which functions all over the body uses some specific channels through which it moves. These channels or passages are known as Nadis. According to the ancient scriptures, there is not a single part in the human body which has not been traversed through or connected with any of the Nadis. There is a network of the Nadis, all over the body. Amongst the thousands of them, Ida, Pingala and Sushumna are considered as the three most important Nadis. There is an extensive description of three Nadis in the Yogic literature but here we will try to get acquainted with their salient features, alone.

## **Ida Nadi**

This Nadi originates from the left side of the base of the spine and while traversing upward in a spiral way, reaches the roof of the left nostril. Ida Nadi primarily controls all those activities which are anabolic or constructive in nature, which conserve the energy and give cooling effect to the body. This Nadi is symbolically equated with the female aspect, is ascribed the blue colour and is being governed by the Moon as its presiding deity.

## **Pingala Nadi**

This Nadi arises from the right side of the base of the spine and while traversing upward in the spiral way reaches the roof of the right nostril. Pingala Nadi primarily controls all those activities which are catabolic or destructive in nature, which consume the energy and generate the heat in the body. This Nadi is symbolically equated with the male aspect, is ascribed the red colour and is considered as being governed by the Sun as its presiding deity.

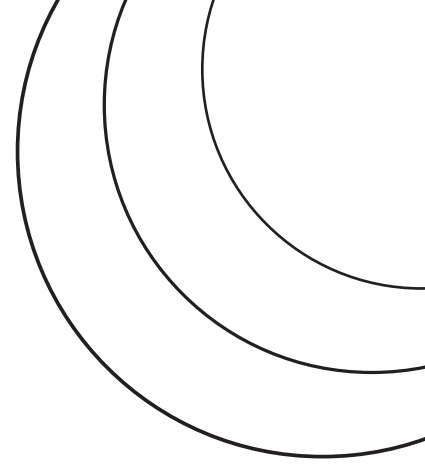
## **Sushumna Nadi**

This Nadi also arises from the base of the spine and traverses up along the mid-line between Ida and Pingala Nadis. It reaches the opening in the base of the skull and through it, the brain itself. It is ascribed the white colour and as being governed by Agni (fire) as its presiding deity. In normal circumstances this central channel (Madhyapatha) remains inactive and the Prana Shakti does not operate through it. But when through the Yogic practices, the functions governed by the Ida and Pingala Nadis are brought in absolute harmony and when they begin to function as an integrated whole, without any disturbance or obstruction, the subtler aspect of the Pranic energy as gets freed from the botheration of maintaining these activities, start operating through the Sushumna Nadi. As the Sushumna Nadi gets activated and the Pranic energy starts flowing upward, it slowly throws open the entirely new dimension of experience which is not limited by the concept of time and space. The rising of Prana through the activated Sushumna Nadi is known as the awakening of Kundalini Shakti.

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# NADIS

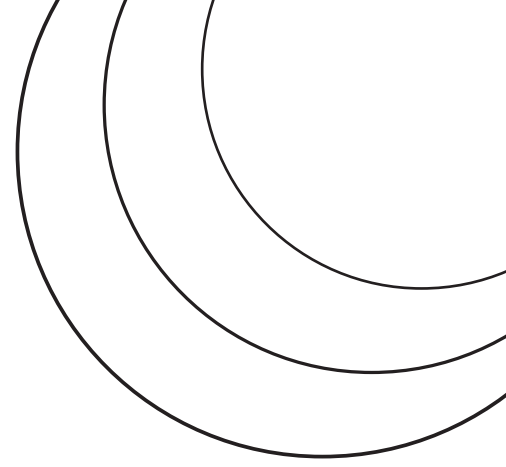


We can understand the concept of Nadis by comparing it with the pathways in the air, which the aeroplanes have to follow. Though these pathways in the space of the sky are precise and the aeroplane have to abide by the specific traffic rules as they steer their way on it; they cannot be shown in the material form. In the same way Prana follows the specific pathway called Nadis, which can be felt in the form of subtle internal sensations but cannot be shown in the form of some objective structure. It is not, surprising therefore that there seems to be a lot of variation in the description about the location and the layout of these Nadis, in the Yogic literature.

Some authorities describe that all of these Nadis arise from the base of the spine and from there spread all over the body while others give the location of their origin either as the area just behind the naval region, or at the level of the heart or even inside the skull cavity out of the brain. Amongst the various descriptions, the one given in the Shivasamhita is quite interesting as it agrees to a large extent with the modern anatomical description of the brain and the spinal cord. It says that 'there is a thousand petal lotus called Sahasrara, prominently placed under the roof of the skull. In the bulbous root of the lotus, there is a place of origin called Yoni, looking downwards.

The hollow root of the Sushumna originates there and extends down upto the Muladhara Chakra at the base of them spine. It further mentions that 'all the Nadis are like lotus fibres running downwards from the skull and are supported by the spinal column'. Thus it might be possible to say that these Nadis (and some vital nodal or junctional points on the pathway of these Nadis, called Chakra) could be the same as the Brain, spinal cord and various Nerves including those belonging to Autonomic Nervous System. But this is at best a conjuncture as for the Yogis the knowledge of the Nadis arose essentially out of the awareness of internal sensations and not so much out of the dissection of the human body. It has been the aim of the Pranayama that through its practice one should become aware of the whole network of the Nadis and functioning of the Prana through them, thereby gaining an ability to regulate the whole activity of Prana

# 1 NATURAL BREATHING



Sit in a comfortable meditation posture or lie in shavasana and relax the whole body. Observe the natural and spontaneous breathing process. Develop total awareness of the rhythmic flow of the breath. Feel the breath flowing in and out of the nose. Do not control the breath in any way. Notice that the breath is cool as it enters the nostrils and warm as it flows out.

Observe this with the attitude of a detached witness. Feel the breath flowing in and out at the back of the mouth above the throat. Bring the awareness down to the region of the throat and feel the breath flowing in the throat. Bring the awareness down to the region of the chest and feel the breath flowing in the trachea and bronchial tubes.

Next, feel the breath flowing in the lungs. Be aware of the lungs expanding and relaxing. Shift the attention to the rib cage and observe the expansion and relaxation of this area. Bring the awareness down to the abdomen. Feel the abdomen move upward on inhalation and downward on exhalation.

Finally, become aware of the whole breathing process from the nostrils to the abdomen and continue observing it for some time. Bring the awareness back to observing the physical body as one unit and open the eyes.





# 2 ABDOMINAL BREATHING

Abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing is practised by enhancing the action of the diaphragm and minimising the action of the rib cage. The diaphragm is a domed sheet of muscle that separates the lungs from the abdominal cavity and, when functioning correctly, promotes the most efficient type of breathing. It is the effect of the diaphragm rather than the diaphragm itself that is experienced as the stomach rises and falls. Sensitivity to the muscle itself, however, will come with practice. During inhalation the diaphragm moves downward, pushing the abdominal contents downward and outward. During exhalation the diaphragm moves upward and the abdominal contents move inward. Movement of the diaphragm signifies that the lower lobes of the lungs are being utilised. The proper use of the diaphragm causes equal expansion of the alveoli, improves lymphatic drainage from basal parts of the lungs, massages the liver, stomach, intestines and other organs that lie immediately beneath it, exerts a positive effect on the cardiac functions and coronary supply, and improves oxygenation of the blood and circulation.

Abdominal breathing is the most natural and efficient way to breathe. Due to tension, poor posture, restrictive clothing and lack of training, however, it is often forgotten. Once this technique again becomes a part of daily life and correct breathing is restored, there will be a great improvement in the state of physical and mental wellbeing.

## **Abdominal breathing exercise**

Lie in shavasana and relax the whole body. Observe the spontaneous breath without controlling it in any way. Let it be absolutely natural. Continue observing the natural breath for some time. Place the right hand on the abdomen just above the navel and the left hand over the centre of the chest. The right hand will move up with inhalation and down with exhalation. The left hand should not move with the breath. There should be no tension in the abdomen. Do not try to force the movement in any way. Try not to expand the chest or move the shoulders. Feel the abdomen expanding and contracting. Continue breathing slowly and deeply. Inhale while expanding the abdomen as much as possible, without expanding the rib cage. At the end of the inhalation the diaphragm will be compressing the abdomen and the navel will be at its highest point. On exhalation the diaphragm moves upward and the abdomen moves downward. At the end of the exhalation the abdomen will be contracted and the navel compressed towards the spine.

Continue for a few minutes.

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# 3 THORACIC BREATHING

Thoracic breathing utilises the middle lobes of the lungs by expanding and contracting the rib cage. It expends more energy than abdominal breathing for the same quantity of air exchange. It is often associated with physical exercise and exertion, as well as stress and tension, when it helps the body to obtain more oxygen. However, the tendency in many people is to continue this type of breathing long after the stressful situation has passed, creating bad breathing habits and continued tension.

## **Thoracic breathing exercise**

Sit in a meditation posture or lie in shavasana and relax the whole body. Maintain unbroken awareness of the natural breath for some time, concentrating on the sides of the chest. Discontinue any further use of the diaphragm and begin to inhale by slowly expanding the rib cage. Feel the movement of the individual ribs outward and upward, and be aware of this expansion drawing air into the lungs.

Expand the chest as much as possible. Exhale by relaxing the chest muscles. Feel the rib cage contracting and forcing the air out of the lungs. Breathe slowly and deeply through the chest with total awareness. Do not use the diaphragm.

Continue thoracic breathing for a few minutes, pausing slightly after each inhalation and exhalation.

# 4 CLAVICULAR BREATHING

Clavicular breathing is the final stage of total rib cage expansion. It occurs after the thoracic inhalation has been completed. In order to absorb a little more air into the lungs, the upper ribs and the collar bone are pulled upwards by the muscles of the neck, throat and sternum. This requires maximum expansion on inhalation and only the upper lobes of the lungs are ventilated. In daily life, clavicular breathing is only used under conditions of extreme physical exertion and when experiencing obstructive airway diseases such as asthma.

## **Clavicular breathing exercise**

Lie in shavasana and relax the whole body.

Perform thoracic breathing for a few minutes. Inhale, fully expanding the rib cage.

When the ribs are fully expanded, inhale a little more until expansion is felt in the upper portion of the lungs around the base of the neck. The shoulders and collar bone should also move up slightly. This will take some effort.

Exhale slowly, first releasing the lower neck and upper chest, then relax the rest of the rib cage back to its starting position.

Continue for a few more breaths, observing the effect of this type of breathing.

# 5 YOGIC BREATHING

Yogic breathing combines the previous three techniques. It is used to maximise inhalation and exhalation. Its purpose is to gain control of the breath, correct poor breathing habits and increase oxygen intake. It may be practised at any time and is especially useful in situations of high stress or anger for calming the nerves. However, while its inclusion in a daily yoga programme will correct and deepen natural breathing patterns, yogic breathing itself should not be performed continually.

## **Yogic breathing exercise**

Sit in a meditation posture or lie in shavasana and relax the whole body. Inhale slowly and deeply, allowing the abdomen to expand fully. Try to breathe so slowly that little or no sound of the breath can be heard. Feel the air reaching into the bottom of the lungs. At the end of abdominal expansion, start to expand the chest outward and upward. When the ribs are fully expanded, inhale a little more until expansion is felt in the upper portion of the lungs around the base of the neck. The shoulders and collar bone should also move up slightly. Some tension will be felt in the neck muscles. The rest of the body should be relaxed. Feel the air filling the upper lobes of the lungs. This completes one inhalation.

The whole process should be one continuous movement, each phase of breathing merging into the next without any obvious transition point. There should be no jerks or unnecessary strain. The breathing should be like the swell of the sea. Now start to exhale. First, relax the lower neck and upper chest, then allow the chest to contract downward and then inward. Next, allow the diaphragm to push upward and toward the chest. Without straining, try to empty the lungs as much as possible by drawing or pulling the abdominal wall as near as possible to the spine.

The entire movement should be harmonious and flowing. Hold the breath for a few seconds at the end of exhalation. This completes one round of yogic breathing. At first perform 5 to 10 rounds and slowly increase to 10 minutes daily.

## **Practice note**

Yogic breathing is used in most pranayamas. The main requirement, however, is that respiration be comfortable and relaxed. Consequently, once awareness and control of the breathing process has been established, the clavicular technique is dropped and yogic breathing is modified to become a combination of abdominal and thoracic breathing. The breath should flow naturally and not be forced.

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# 6 NADI SHODHANA RANAYAMA



Hand position: Nasagra Mudra [nosetip position] Hold the fingers of the right hand in front of the face. Rest the index and middle fingers gently on the eyebrow centre. Both fingers should be relaxed. The thumb is above the right nostril and the ring finger above the left. These two digits control the flow of breath in the nostrils by alternately pressing on one nostril, blocking the flow of breath, and then the other. The little finger is comfortably folded. When practising for long periods, the elbow may be supported by the left hand although care is needed to prevent chest restriction.

## **NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA (PSYCHIC NETWORK PURIFICATION) TECHNIQUE 1: PREPARATORY PRACTICE**

Sit in any comfortable meditation posture, preferably siddha/siddha yoni asana or padmasana. [Those who cannot sit in a meditation posture may sit against a wall with the legs outstretched or in a chair which has a straight back]. Keep the head and spine upright. Relax the whole body and close the eyes. Practise yogic breathing for some time. Adopt nasagra mudra with the right hand and place the left hand on the knee in chin or jnana mudra.

Close the right nostril with the thumb. Inhale and exhale through the left nostril 5 times. The rate of inhalation/exhalation should be normal. Be aware of each breath. After 5 breaths release the pressure of the thumb on the right nostril and press the left nostril with the ring finger, blocking the flow of air.

Inhale and exhale through the right nostril 5 times, keeping the respiration rate normal. Lower the hand and breathe 5 times through both nostrils together. This is one round.

Practise 5 rounds or for 3 to 5 minutes, making sure that there is no sound as the air passes through the nostrils. After practising for 15 days go on to technique 2.

# NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA

## **NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA (PSYCHIC NETWORK PURIFICATION) TECHNIQUE 2: ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING**

In this technique the duration of inhalation/exhalation is controlled.

Close the right nostril with the thumb and breathe in through the left nostril. At the same time count mentally, «1, Om; 2, Om; 3, Om», until the inhalation ends comfortably. This is the basic count.

Breathe deeply with yogic breathing. Do not strain. Close the left nostril with the ring finger, release the pressure of the thumb on the right nostril and while breathing out through the right nostril, simultaneously count, «1, Om; 2, Om; 3, Om». The time for inhalation and exhalation should be equal. Next, inhale through the right nostril, keeping the same count in the same manner. At the end of inhalation close the right nostril, open the left nostril and exhale through the left nostril, counting as before. This is one round. Practise 10 rounds.

### **Ratio and timing**

After a few days, if there is no difficulty, increase the length of inhalation/exhalation by one count. Continue in this way, increasing the inhalation/exhalation by one count as it becomes easy, until the count of 12:12 is reached. Do not force the breath in any way and be careful not to speed up the counting during exhalation to compensate for shortage of breath. At the slightest sign of discomfort reduce the count.

After perfecting the above ratio, it may be changed to 1:2. For example, breathe in for a count of 5 and breathe out for a count of 10.

Continue extending the breath by adding one count to the inhalation and two to the exhalation, up to the count of 12:24. This ratio establishes a calming rhythm for the brain and heart, assisting the treatment of cardiovascular and nervous system disorders specifically, and stress related conditions generally.

When this technique can be performed with complete ease move on to technique 3

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# NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA

## **NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA (PSYCHIC NETWORK PURIFICATION) TECHNIQUE 3: ANTA KUMBHAKA (INNER RETENTION)**

In this technique antar kumbhaka or internal breath retention is introduced. Close the right nostril and breathe in slowly through the left nostril for a count of 5. At the end of inhalation, close both nostrils and retain the air in the lungs for a count of 5. The glottis may be slightly contracted to hold the air within the lungs. Open the right nostril, breathe in slightly through the right nostril and then slowly breathe out through the same nostril for a count of 5. This slight inhalation at the end of inner retention helps to bring the respiratory muscles back into action again and relieves the locked condition of the glottis. The exhalation should be smooth and controlled and of the same length as the inhalation. At the end of exhalation, immediately inhale through the right nostril for a count of 5, keeping the left nostril closed. Again, retain the breath for a count of 5 with both nostrils closed.

Open the left nostril, breathe in slightly through the left nostril and then breathe out through the same nostril for a count of 5. This is one round. Maintain constant awareness of the count and of the breath. Practise 10 rounds.

### **Ratio and timing:**

The maintenance of a strict ratio during inhalation, kumbhaka and exhalation is of the utmost importance. The ratio will change as the ability to hold the breath for longer periods of time progressively develops. After mastering the ratio of 1:1:1, increase the ratio to 1:1:2. For example, inhale for a count of 5, perform internal kumbhaka for a count of 5 and exhale for a count of 10. After some weeks of practice, when this ratio has been mastered, increase the ratio to 1:2:2. Inhale for a count of 5, do internal kumbhaka for a count of 10 and exhale for a count of 10.

After mastering the ratio of 1:2:2, gradually increase the count by adding one unit to the inhalation [e.g. 5 becomes 6], 2 units to the retention and 2 units to the exhalation [making each of them 12]. The count of one round will then be 6:12:12. When this has been perfected and there is absolutely no discomfort, increase the count to 7:14:14.

Gradually increase the count over a period of one or two years to 24:48:48. Thereafter, gradually increase the ratio to 1:3:2, and 1:4:2. Once this has been established, move on to technique 4.

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# NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA

## **NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA (PSYCHIC NETWORK PURIFICATION) TECHNIQUE 4: ANTAH AND BAHIR KUMBHAKA (INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RETENTION)**

In this technique bahir kumbhaka or outer breath retention is introduced. Do not try to hold the breath outside for too long at first, even though it may seem easy.

Inhale through the left nostril. Retain the breath inside in antar kumbhaka as described in technique 3. Exhale through the right nostril. After exhalation, when the lungs are deflated as much as possible, close both nostrils and hold the breath out for the chosen count. The glottis may be slightly contracted to hold the air out of the lungs. Exhale slightly through the right nostril immediately before inhaling. This will release the lock on the lungs and the glottis and bring the respiratory system smoothly back into operation.

Inhale slowly through the right nostril. Retain the breath inside in antar kumbhaka. Exhale through the left nostril. Again, hold the breath out in bahir kumbhaka to the count, with both nostrils closed. This is one round.

Remember to exhale slightly through the right nostril before breathing in at the start of the next round. Practise 5 rounds.

### **Ratio and timing:**

The ratio should start off as 1:4:2:2 for inhalation, internal retention, exhalation, external retention. The duration of inhalation should slowly be increased from 5 to 6 counts, then from 6 to 7 and so on, and the duration of exhalation and retention should be adjusted accordingly. Do not increase the count for inhalation until the relative counts for exhalation and breath retention are comfortable.

### **Advanced practice:**

Nadi shodhana pranayama may be practised in conjunction with jalandhara, moola and uddiyana bandhas]. First practise jalandhara bandha with internal breath retention only. Once this practice has been perfected, combine jalandhara bandha with external breath retention. Then introduce moola bandha with jalandhara during internal retention, then external retention. When this has been mastered, apply uddiyana bandha on external retention only. It may be necessary to adjust the ratio of the breath to suit the individual capacity.

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# \*REMARKS ON THE NADHI SHODHANA'S BREATHING

**Breathing:** Breathing should be silent in all techniques of nadi shodhana, ensuring that it is not forced or restricted in any way. As the ratio and duration increases the breath becomes very light and subtle. Increased ratios and breath duration should not be attained at the expense of relaxation, rhythm and awareness. The flow of breath must be smooth, with no jerks, throughout the practice. Always use the chest and diaphragm muscles and practise yogic breathing. If one of the nostrils is blocked, perform jala neti or breath balancing exercises before commencing.

**Awareness:** Physical - on the breath and the counting. Mental - it is easy for the mind to wander during nadi shodhana. Simply be aware of this wandering tendency of the mind, continue the practice and the count. This will automatically encourage the awareness to return to the practice.

**Spiritual - on ajna chakra:** Depending on the phase of the moon, one of the two nostrils usually becomes strongly dominant during the time of sunrise and sunset. This is a period of intense swara, 'breath', activity and it is not advisable to alter the flows at this time. Under no circumstance should the breath be forced. Never breathe through the mouth. Proceed carefully and only under expert guidance. At the slightest sign of discomfort, reduce the duration of inhalation/ exhalation/retention and, if necessary, discontinue the practice for the day. Nadi shodhana should never be rushed.

**Sequence:** Nadi shodhana should be practised after asanas and heating or cooling pranayamas, and before bhramari and ujjayi pranayamas. The best time to practise is from 4 to 6 am; however, it may be performed any time during the day except after meals.

**Duration:** 5 to 10 rounds or 10 to 15 minutes daily.

## **Benefits**

Nadi shodhana ensures that the whole body is nourished by an extra supply of oxygen. Carbon dioxide is efficiently expelled and the blood is purified of toxins. The brain centres are stimulated to work nearer to their optimum capacity. It also induces tranquillity, clarity of thought and concentration, and is recommended for those engaged in mental work. It increases vitality and lowers levels of stress and anxiety by harmonising the pranas. It clears pranic blockages and balances ida and pingala nadis, causing sushumna nadi to flow, which leads to deep states of meditation and spiritual awakening.

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# 7 SHEETALI PRANAYAMA

Sit in any comfortable meditation posture with the hands on the knees in chin or jnana mudra. Close the eyes and relax the whole body. Extend the tongue outside the mouth as far as possible without strain. Roll the sides of the tongue up so that it forms a tube. Inhale and draw the breath in through this tube. At the end of inhalation, draw the tongue in, close the mouth and exhale through the nose. Practise yogic breathing throughout. The breath should produce a noise similar to rushing wind. A feeling of icy coldness will be experienced on the tongue and the roof of the mouth. This is one round. Practise 9 rounds.

**Duration:** Gradually increase the number of rounds from 9 to 15 and the duration of each inhalation/exhalation. For general purposes 15 rounds is sufficient; however, up to 60 rounds may be performed in very hot weather.

**Awareness:** On the tongue and the cooling sensation of the breath.

**Sequence:** Practise after asanas and other yogic practices which heat the body in order to restore temperature balance.

**Precaution:** This technique should not be practised in a dirty polluted atmosphere or during cold weather. The nose heats up and cleans the inhaled air before it enters the delicate lungs. However, breathing through the mouth bypasses this air-conditioning and the induction of cold or dirty air directly into the lungs may cause harm.

**Contra-indications:** People suffering from low blood pressure or respiratory disorders such as asthma, bronchitis and excessive mucus should not practise this pranayama. Those with heart disease should practise without breath retention. This practice cools down the activity of the lower energy centres, therefore, those suffering from chronic constipation should avoid it. Generally, this pranayama should not be practised in winter or in cool climates.

**Benefits:** This practice cools the body and the mind as well. It affects important brain centres associated with biological drives and temperature regulation. It cools and reduces mental and emotional excitation, and encourages the free flow of prana throughout the body. It induces muscular relaxation, mental tranquillity and may be used as a tranquilliser before sleep. It gives control over hunger and thirst, and generates a feeling of satisfaction. It helps reduce blood pressure and acid stomach.

**Advanced practice:** This pranayama may also be combined with jalandhara bandha on internal retention (for details of this practice refer to the section Bandha). Do not strain when performing kumbhaka, one or two seconds is sufficient at first. The duration may be increased gradually as the technique is mastered.

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# 8 BHRAMARI PRANAYAMA

Sit in a comfortable meditation asana. The spinal cord should be erect, the head straight and the hands resting on the knees in chin or jnana mudra. The position of nadanusandhana asana, which is used in nada yoga, may also be utilised as follows. Sit on a rolled blanket with the heels drawn up to the buttocks. Place the feet flat on the floor with the knees raised and the elbows resting on the knees.

Close the eyes and relax the whole body for a short time. The lips should remain gently closed with the teeth slightly separated throughout the practice. This allows the sound vibration to be heard and felt more distinctly in the brain. Make sure the jaws are relaxed. Raise the arms sideways and bend the elbows, bringing the hands to the ears. Use the index or middle finger to plug the ears. The flaps of the ears may be pressed without inserting the fingers. If the position of nadanusandhana has been assumed, plug the ears with the thumbs, resting the other four fingers on the head. Bring the awareness to the centre of the head, where ajna chakra is located, and keep the body absolutely still. Breathe in through the nose. Exhale slowly and in a controlled manner while making a deep, steady humming sound like that of the black bee. The humming sound should be smooth, even and continuous for the duration of the exhalation. The sound should be soft and mellow, making the front of the skull reverberate. This is one round. At the end of exhalation, breathe in deeply and repeat the process. Perform 5 rounds.

**Awareness:** Physical - on the humming sound within the head and on making the breath steady and even.

**Spiritual** - on ajna chakra.

**Duration:** 5 to 10 rounds is sufficient in the beginning, then slowly increase to 10 to 15 minutes. In cases of extreme mental tension or anxiety, or when used to assist the healing process, practise for up to 30 minutes.

**Contra-indications:** Bhramari should not be performed while lying down. People suffering from severe ear infections should not practise this pranayama until the infection has cleared up. Those with heart disease must practise without breath retention.

**Benefits:** Bhramari relieves stress and cerebral tension, alleviating anger, anxiety and insomnia, and reducing blood pressure. It speeds up the healing of body tissue and may be practised after operations. It strengthens and improves the voice and eliminates throat ailments.

**Advanced practice:** Once the basic form of bhramari has been mastered, jalandhara and moola bandhas may be incorporated into the practice in conjunction with internal breath retention. As an alternative practice, contract the throat while inhaling as in ujjayi pranayama, only more strongly. In this way a humming sound can be produced on inhalation as well as exhalation.

## shantarām

HATHA YOGA by NICOLAS AMBROSETTI

# 9 UJJAYI PRANAYAMA

Sit in any comfortable position, preferably a meditation asana. Close the eyes and relax the whole body. Take the awareness to the breath in the nostrils and allow the breathing to become calm and rhythmic. After some time, transfer the awareness to the throat. Try to feel or to imagine that the breath is being drawn in and out through the throat and not through the nostrils; as if inhalation and exhalation are taking place through a small hole in the throat. As the breathing becomes slower and deeper, gently contract the glottis so that a soft snoring sound like the breathing of a sleeping baby is produced in the throat. If this is practised correctly there will be a simultaneous contraction of the abdomen. This happens by itself, without any effort being made. Both inhalation and exhalation should be long, deep and controlled. Practise yogic breathing while concentrating on the sound produced by the breath in the throat. The sound of the breath should not be very loud. It should just be audible to the practitioner but not to another person unless they are sitting very close.

**Duration:** Practise for 10 to 20 minutes.

**Contra-indications:** People who are too introverted by nature should not perform this practice. Those suffering from heart disease should not combine bandhas or breath retention with ujjayi.

**Benefits:** Ujjayi is classified as a tranquillising pranayama and it also has a heating effect on the body. This practice is used in yoga therapy to soothe the nervous system and calm the mind. It has a profoundly relaxing effect at the psychic level. It helps to relieve insomnia and may be practised in shavasana just before sleep. The basic form without breath retention or bandhas slows down the heart rate and is useful for people suffering from high blood pressure. Ujjayi alleviates fluid retention. It removes disorders of the dhatu, which are the 7 constituents of the body: blood, bone, marrow, fat, semen, skin and flesh.

**Advanced practice:** After becoming proficient in the practice, ujjayi may be performed with jalandhara bandha and moola bandha in conjunction with internal and external kumbhaka. Do not strain when performing kumbhaka, one or two seconds is sufficient at first. The duration may be increased gradually as the technique is mastered.

**Note:** The Sanskrit word ujjayi means 'victorious'. It is derived from the root ji, which means 'to conquer' or 'to acquire by conquest', and the prefix ud, which means 'bondage'. Ujjayi is therefore the pranayama which gives freedom from bondage. It is also known as the psychic breath, as it leads to subtle states of mind and is used together with khechari mudra, the tongue lock, in tantric meditation techniques such as mantra japa, ajapa japa, kriya yoga and prana vidya.

**shantarām**

HATHA YOGA by NICOLAS AMBROSETTI

# 10 BHASTRIKA PRANAYAMA

Preparatory practice: Sit in any comfortable meditation posture, preferably padmasana, ardha padmasana or siddha/ siddha yoni asana, with the hands resting on the knees in either chin or jnana mudra. Keep the head and spine straight, close the eyes and relax the whole body. Take a deep breath in and breathe out forcefully through the nose. Do not strain. Immediately afterwards breathe in with the same force. During inhalation the diaphragm descends and the abdomen moves outward. During exhalation the diaphragm moves upward and the abdomen moves inward. The above movements should be slightly exaggerated. Continue in this manner, counting 10 breaths. At the end of 10 breaths, take a deep breath in and breathe out slowly. This is one round. Practise up to 5 rounds.

Keep the eyes closed and concentrate on the breathing and the counting. When accustomed to this style of breathing, gradually increase the speed, always keeping the breath rhythmical. Inhalation and exhalation must be equal. Keep the head and spine straight. Close the eyes and relax the whole body.

## **Left nostril:**

Raise the right hand and perform nasagra mudra. Close the right nostril with the thumb. Breathe in and out forcefully, without straining, through the left nostril 10 times. Count each breath mentally. The abdomen should expand and contract rhythmically with the breath. The pumping action should be performed by the abdomen alone. Do not expand the chest or raise the shoulders. The body should not jerk. There should be a snuffing sound in the nose but no sound should come from the throat or chest. After 10 respirations, breathe in deeply through the left nostril keeping the right nostril closed. Fill the lungs as much as possible, expanding both the chest and abdomen. Close both nostrils and hold the breath inside. Retain the breath for a few seconds. Exhale through the left nostril.

## **Right nostril**

Close the left nostril and breathe in and out forcefully 10 times through the right nostril, counting each time. Inhale slowly and deeply through the right nostril. Close both nostrils and hold the breath inside. Retain the breath for a few seconds. Breathe out slowly through the right nostril.

## **Both nostrils:**

Open both nostrils. Breathe in and out forcefully through both nostrils 10 times, mentally counting each time. Inhale slowly and deeply through both nostrils. Close both nostrils and retain the breath for a few seconds. Breathe out slowly through both nostrils together. Breathing through the left, the right and both nostrils, as above, forms one complete round.

# 10 BHASTRIKA PRANAYAMA(bis)

**Breathing:** Bhastrika may be practised at three different breath rates: slow, medium and fast, depending on the capacity of the practitioner. **Slow bhastrika** is practised to approximately one breath every two seconds, with no undue force on inhalation or exhalation. It is like amplified normal breathing. It is especially useful for beginners and those using bhastrika for therapeutic purposes, although it may also be practised at all stages. **Medium bhastrika** increases the speed of respiration to approximately one breath every second. **Fast bhastrika** means a breathing speed of around two breaths per second. Both medium and fast breathing are suitable for intermediate and advanced practitioners. The abdominal muscles will become stronger with regular practice. As they do so, the number of respirations may be increased by 5 per month from the initial count of 10 to a maximum count of 40 to 50 respirations through the left, the right and both nostrils.

**Duration:** Up to 5 rounds. Slowly increase the duration of retention up to 30 seconds after breathing through the left, the right and both nostrils. Do not strain.

**Awareness:** Physical - on manipura chakra.

**Precautions:** A feeling of faintness, excessive perspiration or a vomiting sensation indicates that the practice is being performed incorrectly. Avoid violent respiration, facial contortions and excessive shaking of the body. If any of these symptoms are experienced, the advice of a yoga teacher should be sought. This practice is ideal for purifying the blood and eradicating a bad complexion. However, if the stages are rushed, all the impurities will be ejected from the body in a rush which may exacerbate the condition. A slow, conscientious approach to this practice is, therefore, recommended. Bhastrika is a dynamic practice requiring a large expenditure of physical energy. Beginners are advised to take a short rest after each round.

**Contra-indications:** Bhastrika should not be practised by people who suffer from high blood pressure, heart disease, hernia, gastric ulcer, stroke, epilepsy or vertigo. Those suffering from lung diseases such as asthma and chronic bronchitis, or who are recovering from tuberculosis, are recommended to practise only under expert guidance.

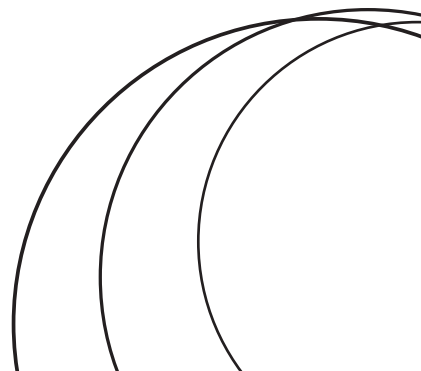
# 10 BHASTRIKA PRANAYAMA(bis)

**Benefits:** This practice burns up toxins and removes diseases of the doshas or humours: kapha, phlegm; pitta, bile; and vata, wind. Because of the rapid exchange of air in the lungs, there is an increase in the exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide into and out of the bloodstream. This stimulates the metabolic rate, producing heat and flushing out wastes and toxins. The rapid and rhythmic movement of the diaphragm also massages and stimulates the visceral organs, toning the digestive system. It is a useful practice for women during labour after a few months of proper preparation. Bhastrika reduces the level of carbon dioxide in the lungs. It is an excellent practice for asthmatics and those suffering from other lung disorders. It alleviates inflammation in the throat and any accumulation of phlegm. It balances and strengthens the nervous system, inducing peace, tranquillity and one pointedness of mind in preparation for meditation.

**Advanced practice:** Once this practice has been mastered, jalandhara and moola bandha may be combined during each internal breath retention or after each round.

**Practice note:** Both nostrils must be clear and flowing freely. Mucus blockages may be removed through the practice of neti. If the flow of breath in the nostrils is unequal, it may be balanced by practising padadhirasana as a breath balancing technique. Beginners should be familiar with abdominal breathing before taking up bhastrika.

**Note:** The Sanskrit word bhastrika means 'bellows'. Thus, bhastrika pranayama is also known as the bellows breath, as air is drawn forcefully in and out of the lungs like the bellows of a village blacksmith. The bellows increases the flow of air into the fire, producing more heat. Similarly, bhastrika pranayama increases the flow of air into the body to produce inner heat at both the physical and subtle levels, stoking the inner fire of mind/body



# 11 KAPALBHATI PRANAYAMA

Sit in any comfortable meditation asana; padmasana, as a first choice, or siddha/siddha yoni asana, with the head and spine straight and the hands resting on the knees in either chin or jnana mudra. Close the eyes and relax the whole body. Inhale deeply through both nostrils, expanding the abdomen, and exhale with a forceful contraction of the abdominal muscles. Do not strain. The next inhalation takes place by passively allowing the abdominal muscles to expand. Inhalation should be a spontaneous or passive recoil, involving no effort. Perform 10 respirations to begin with. Count each respiration mentally.

After completing 10 rapid breaths in succession, inhale and exhale deeply. This is one round. Practise 3 to 5 rounds.

After completing the practice, maintain awareness of the void in the region of the eyebrow centre, feeling an all-pervading emptiness and calm.

**Breathing:** It is important that the rapid breathing used in these techniques be from the abdomen and not from the chest. The number of respirations may be increased from the initial count of 10 up to 20, as the abdominal muscles become stronger.

**Duration:** Up to 5 rounds of 10 to 20 breaths. Advanced practitioners may extend the number of rounds to 10 or more; longer periods than this should only be practised under expert guidance.

**Awareness:** Physical - on rhythmic breathing, keeping count of the respirations.

**Spiritual** - on chidakasha or the void at the eyebrow centre.

**Sequence:** Kapalbhati should be practised after asanas or neti and immediately before pratyahara and dharana meditation techniques. It may be performed at any time of day but should only be practised on an empty stomach, 3 to 4 hours after meals.

**Precautions:** If pain or dizziness is experienced, stop the practice and sit quietly for some time. When the sensation has passed, recommence the practice with more awareness and less force. If the problem continues, consult a yoga teacher.



# 11 KAPALBHATI PRANAYAMA(bis)

**Contra-indications:** Kapalbhati should not be practised by those suffering from heart disease, high blood pressure, vertigo, epilepsy, stroke, hernia or gastric ulcer.

**Benefits:** Kapalbhati purifies ida and pingala nadis, and also removes sensory distractions from the mind. It is used to energise the mind for mental work, to remove sleepiness and to prepare the mind for meditation. It has a similar cleansing effect on the lungs to bhastrika and is, therefore, a good practice for asthmatics and those suffering from emphysema, bronchitis and tuberculosis. After a few months of proper preparation, it can be effective for women to use during childbirth. It balances and strengthens the nervous system and tones the digestive organs. For spiritual aspirants, this practice arrests thoughts and visions.

**Practice note:** Although kapalbhati is similar to bhastrika, there are important differences. Bhastrika uses force on both inhalation and exhalation, expanding and contracting the lungs above and below their resting or basic volume. Kapalbhati, on the other hand, actively reduces the volume of air in the lungs below this level through forced exhalation. In this practice, inhalation remains a passive process which brings the level of air in the lungs back to the basic volume only. This way of breathing reverses the normal breathing process which involves active inhalation and passive exhalation.

**Note:** Kapalbhati is also one of the six shatkarmas. The Sanskrit word kapal means 'cranium' or 'forehead' and bhāti means 'light' or 'splendour' and also 'perception or 'knowledge'. Hence kapalbhati is the practice which brings a state of light or clarity to the frontal region of the brain. Another name for this practice is kapalshodhana, the word shodhana meaning 'to purify'.