

YogaUp with Yoga Alliance
200 Hrs TTC - May 2020
PRANAYAMA, Bandha, Mudra, Kriya

Pranayama - The science of breathing.

Breathing is a vital process that starts at the time of birth and stops at death. We inhale oxygen (O₂) & exhale carbon dioxide (CO₂).

Inhalation: *PURAKA*

Exhalation: *RECHAKA*

'Prana' is the vital energy and 'ayam' is control or to regulate. Regular practice of Pranayama can lead to spiritual awakening and self-realisation. Various types of Pranayama have different effects on the body, mind and spirit.

The process of controlling or regulating the vital energy is called *Pranayama*.

Generally, breathing includes inhalation and exhalation but Pranayam includes retention of breath known as *Kumbhaka* (in Sanskrit) and locking the energy known as *Bandha* (in Sanskrit). These are very important processes in Pranayama.

KUMBHAKA (RETENTION OF BREATH)

The air can be retained in the lungs or outside the lungs.

Kumbhaka, retention of breath is further divided into:

ANTAR Kumbhaka: Inhalation Retention [after Inhaling]

Retention after inhalation helps in increasing oxygen in our blood, organs & every cell of the body. Increased supply of oxygen revitalises our body and regulates the flow of puranic energy throughout the body and makes every function of the body efficient.

BAHIR Kumbhaka: Exhalation Retention [after exhaling]

Retention after exhalation increases carbon dioxide in the blood, which stresses our nervous system. Continuous practice of Bahir Kumbhaka results in the nervous system becoming tolerant.

BANDHA (ENERGY LOCKS)

Bandha means to lock, hold or tighten and aims to move prana in particular areas.

There are 3 types of Bandhas:

- * Mula Bandha – in the perineum
- * Uddiyana Bandha – in the abdomen
- * Jalandar Bandha - in the throat

PRANAYAMA PRACTICE

Breathing: Always breathe through the nose and not the mouth unless otherwise specifically instructed.

Time: The best time to practise pranayama is during the early morning when the body is fresh and the mind has very few impressions. If this is not possible another good time is just after sunset. Tranquilising pranayama may be performed before sleep. Try to practise regularly at the same time each day.

Place: Practice in a quiet, clean and pleasant room which is well ventilated but not drafty. Practising in direct sunlight, air-conditioned room or under a fan may upset the body temperature.

3 IMPORTANT COMPONENTS

1. Asana (posture)

- * Take any meditative posture like padmasana, Ardha padmasana, Vajrayana or simple sukhasana.
- * Make sure your knees are in a comfortable position.
- * Usually you tend to slouch your back but make conscious efforts to make it straight as you want an uninterrupted flow of your breath.

2. Mudra (hand gesture)

- * Chin mudra, Jnana mudra, Dhyan mudra, Bhairavi mudra, Nasika mudra
- * There are 'panchamahabhutas' - five important elements of nature ie. water, earth, space, air & fire on our palms. The connection of these elements has certain positive impacts on our body that enhances the effects of pranayama.

3. Drishti (eyes)

- * Closed eyes assists your consciousness to travel inwards easily to focus on your breath. Keeping it open certainly distracts you but closed eyes helps you bring more awareness.

NATURAL BREATHING

It is the starting point of the breathwork. Sit in any comfortable meditative posture, keeping your spine erect and your shoulders rolled back and relaxed. Make sure there is no discomfort in the knees. Take any mudra (hand gesture) and gently close your eyes. Start observing your natural breath. Observe the depth and the length of your inhalation and exhalation. Observe the movement of your chest and your belly. Anchor your mind with your breath. Become aware of your breathing pattern.

ABDOMINAL BREATHING

Anatomy:

In abdominal breathing, we use the diaphragm. In inhalation the diaphragm moves downward contracting the abdominal organs. And exhalation the diaphragm will release back to its original place. If we use the diaphragm then the lower lobes of the lungs are being used, improving their efficiency and giving a positive effect to the heart, liver, stomach and intestine. This breathing exercise helps us to slow down our breathing which leads us to live longer.

Limitation: Needs to be practiced in an empty stomach.

Benefits:

- * Massages the liver stomach and intestines
- * Lowers the respiratory rate
- * Lowers the blood pressure
- * Improves cardiac functions
- * Improves oxygenation of blood and circulation
- * Helps with relaxation
- * Strengthens the nervous system
- * Helps with migraine and vertigo
- * Calms the mind
- * Good preparation for pranayama

Technique:

Once your mind is anchored to your breath slowly restrict the movement of your chest completely and focus on breathing only from the belly. For better understanding keep your right palm on your belly and left palm on your chest. Now as you inhale your right palm will feel the expansion of the belly and as you exhale your right palm will feel the contraction of the belly. Left palm on your chest is to monitor the movement of your chest during inhalation and exhalation. As you inhale belly out as you exhale belly in.

Inhale - Belly out | Exhale - Belly in.

UJJAYI (the victorious breathing)

Anatomy:

It stimulates the nadis, or energy channels, in the sinuses and at the back of the throat, which, in turn, promotes mental clarity and focus. This is also called psychic breath.

Psychosomatic disease and stress related ailments in particular can be effectively treated with this practice. It stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system. This pranayama is very effective for the relaxation of the body and mind.

Limitation:

None for simple variation without retention

Benefits:

- * Soothes the nervous system
- * Improves lung capacity
- * Helpful for reducing insomnia
- * Balances the body, mind and breath
- * Helps to relieve stress related problems
- * Prepares for meditation
- * Reduces throat related issues like thyroid.

Technique:

Here, we use the muscles that we would use to cause a glass to fog (only that you close the mouth). You can also imagine a hole in your throat and inhale and exhale through that hole. You will hear a hissing sound or you can even compare it to the sound of an ocean on inhalation and exhalation by compressing the epiglottis in the throat.

Pranayama, Bandha, Mudra & Kriya by Ms. Himasha Sidhpura (Himi)