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Yoga Breathing Techniques

Introduction

What comes from better breathing? Relaxation for starters. Many yoga breathing techniques are available that also help to reduce stress, increase energy and improve health on all levels.

There is much in the way of instruction in breathing for yoga students. Most of these practices fall within the realm of that branch of yoga known as pranayama.

But there are some basic yoga breathing techniques that everyone can do, and they can be learned quite easily.

But don't be fooled...

These practices, although simple, are powerful health-enhancers, and their practice can help to form the foundation of a healthy life. I'll introduce to three powerful yoga breathing techniques below. But first ...

The Goal of Yoga Breathing Techniques

As you've learned on the previous page entitled Yoga Breathing, most all of us breathe into only a small fraction of our lungs, missing out on a whole lot of potential energy known as prana. So expanding and regulating the breath is one of the primary and fundamental aims of our yoga breathing exercises.

Yogic breathing will help you to develop the maximum capacity of your lungs, activating areas that are usually inactive. Right from the beginning you should gain awareness of how restricted your breathing actually is. With a little effort and practice, you will soon notice an improvement, I assure you!

We could even call these exercises in 'prana breathing'. Relaxation, stress relief, improved vitality and strength, and relief to many breathing problems all result from activating the lungs to their maximum capacity. Without a doubt, yoga breathing for better health is the way to go.

OK, are you ready?

A Couple Tips Before We Get Started...

Make sure you are sitting in a comfortable, relaxed position before starting any yoga breathing techniques.

Also try to find a quiet place, free from any distractions, and also one which is well-ventilated with fresh air. Of course, a quiet place outdoors is ideal.

Sit with your spine straight, and perfectly upright.

Some Basic Yoga Breathing Techniques

- » Dirgha Pranayama
(Deep breathing technique)
- » Sukha Pranayama
(The easy breath)
- » Sukha Purvaka Pranayama
(The four-part breath)
- » Viraghya Pranayama
(The tiger breath)

I. Dirgha Pranayama

It's important, right from the beginning, to learn to breathe deeply and slowly in a controlled manner. This is known as dirgha pranayama (or simply, long or prolonged breathing).

The greatest amount of prana is absorbed by the nerve endings which line the lungs. Shallow breathing limits the amount of absorption, and therefore is a major cause of many of the chronic health problems that people face. The re-establishment of deep, full breathing is so important to re-gaining and maintaining good health.

Method

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed and spine straight

Allow yourself to breathe naturally for a few minutes, letting go of any tension in your body and calming your mind.

In the beginning breathe in and out deeply through the nose several times to ventilate the air that might have been stagnating in the respiratory tracts.

After several ventilating breaths, exhale the air through the mouth, trying to empty the lungs. Maintain the empty lungs for a moment, without straining or forcing yourself.

Inhale slowly and uniformly through the nose, filling your lungs with as much air as possible. Hold your breath with your lungs filled with air for a moment, but again do not force yourself to hold it for too long. In time, you will manage to hold your breath for longer intervals.

Slowly and uniformly exhale through the mouth, avoiding an explosive elimination of the air.

Note: Do every step in a controlled and calm manner.

Relax and take a few comfortable breaths in your own rhythm, and then try again a little deeper, as described above.

Again relax your breath for a few rounds when you feel the urge to do so.

Try a third set, without forcing yourself too much, or overdoing it.

When complete, lie down (in Shava Asana) and breathe in a relaxed fashion, inhaling and exhaling only through the nose now. Allow your body to let go of all tension, while at the same time just keeping your attention on your breath without trying to affect or direct it in any way. Try to maintain your attention for at least 5 minutes before allowing yourself to let go of all efforts and relax completely.

2. Sukha Pranayama

'Sukha' is the Sanskrit word for 'easy'. We use this yoga breathing technique, (the easy breath) to help develop a slow and steady breathing rhythm.

Method

Sit comfortably with your eyes closed and spine straight

Allow yourself to breathe naturally for a few minutes, letting go of any tension in your body and calming your mind.

When you feel at ease, begin inhaling and exhaling deeply and slowly, counting to 6 (roughly 6 seconds) during the inhalation, and likewise, 6 counts for the exhalation.

Perform 6 to 10 rounds of this breath and then allow yourself relax and breathe in an calm manner.

After a few moments, perform another 6 to 10 rounds of the sukha breathing rhythm.

Finish by lying down for 5 to 10 minutes, relaxing the breath and letting go of all tension.

After a few days, begin to increase the duration of practice, breathing in the sukha rhythm (6-count in and 6-count out) eventually up to 5 minutes at a time.

3. Sukha Purvaka Pranayama

The Sanskrit word 'sukha' means 'easy or pleasant'. 'Purvah' refers to 'that which precedes'. Therefore, sukha purvaka pranayama means 'the simple breath which must be mastered before proceeding to more difficult pranayamas'.

In this yoga breathing technique, we are introduced to the four distinct stages (or functions) of the breath:

The inhalation (puraka)

The held-in breath (kumbhaka)

The exhalation (rechaka)

The held-out breath (shunyaka)

Method

Again, sit comfortably with your eyes closed and spine straight.

Allow yourself to breathe naturally for a few minutes, letting go of any tension in your body and calming your mind.

In this yoga breathing technique, breathing happens only through the nose.

One full round consists of the following:

Inhale slowly, for a 6-count

Hold the breath in for a 6-count

Exhale slowly, for a 6-count

Hold the lungs empty for a 6-count

Perform 6 to 9 rounds

Relax the breath for a few moments, and then repeat another 6 to 9 rounds again if able.

Finish by lying down for 5 to 10 minutes, relaxing the breath and letting go of all tension.

4. Vyaghrasana (the tiger breath)

A wonderful yoga breathing technique to help open up the lungs and improve breathing capacity is the vyaghrasana, the 'tiger-breath'. It is performed in chaturanga pada asana (on the hands and knees).

Method

Inhale (to a 6-count) while slowly lowering the abdomen toward the floor and raising the head, neck and chin skyward into a nice back bend.

Exhale (again to a 6-count) and slowly lower the head, drawing your chin in towards the chest, while at the same time pushing firmly with the arms and raising the back into a nice high arch.

Repeat this movement with the corresponding breath 3 to 6 times.

Relax for a few breaths and then repeat another round of 6 to 9 repetitions.

Finish by lying down for 5 to 10 minutes, relaxing the breath and letting go of all tension.



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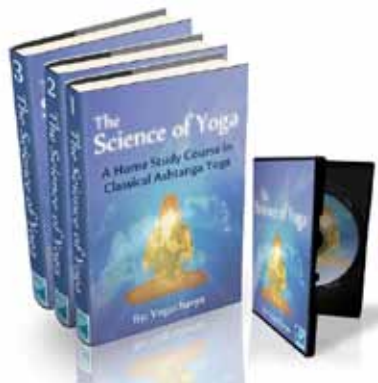


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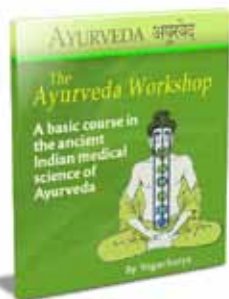
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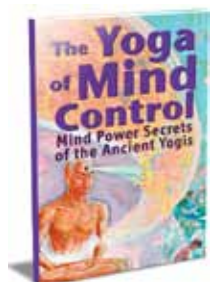
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