

Pranayama

What is Pranayama?

Prana is a Sanskrit word meaning life-force, vitality, universal energy. **Ayama** means *extension* or *expansion*. Together they mean expansion of life-force energy. **Pranayama** is the mastery/control and containment/direction of prana. We can achieve this mastery in yoga through breathing practices that progressively deepen, balance and harmonize the breath and body. Attention to and awareness of our breath is central to the practice of yoga and is the fourth limb of the **Eight-fold Path** of Classical Yoga, as codified in the **Yoga Sutras** written by the sage Patanjali.

Teaching Pranayama

Teaching Principles

1. Introduce only one new pranayama technique per class to Beginners. They may already feel overwhelmed by the newness of the asana practice and are more likely to retain what they are learning if we don't provide them with too much new information.
2. Build on techniques taught in previous classes. For example, the first breathing practice you might teach is *Simple Breath*. This is essentially teaching your students to become aware of how they naturally breathe and of the breathing habits they may have developed. It can also become a form of meditation to bring focused awareness to their natural breathing state.
3. Review previously taught techniques. Whether your students are Beginners or not, as humans we learn new skills through repetition and like to have a sense of mastery of those skills. This will also help your students to enjoy the learning experiences more. Reviewing and repeating helps them to become more familiar with breathing methods that are, perhaps, very different from their habitual breathing patterns.
4. You can teach pranayama/breathing practices during:
 - a. Centering
 - b. Posture Practice/Asanas
 - c. Relaxation
 - d. Meditation

Teaching Components

1. **Context:** Introduce the breath by both its English and Sanskrit names to help your students more easily associate the Sanskrit with the actual breathing method.
2. **Brief Demonstration:** As humans typically 'do what they see', it is helpful to show your students how to 'do' the breathing method. You might say "It sounds/looks something like this." Some breathing practices, like Alternate Nostril variations, require a specific hand position (Mudra) that you will need to demonstrate.
3. **Explain:** Share the benefits, precautions and contraindications applicable to the breathing method they will be exploring. This is especially important if any of your

students have pre-existing conditions that might be helped by the practice or aggravated.

4. **Student Experience:** Giving your students a chance to experience the breathing method on their own teaches them better than words alone. Although there are some things everyone tends to experience with a particular breathing method, each student will also have their own 'lived experience' which adds depth to the universal application of the practice.
5. **Cues:** Some breathing practices are a little more complicated than just simply breathing. In fact, even 'simply breathing' is not so simple for some folks who have breathing disorders. Guide your students visually and verbally, one step at a time, breaking the breathing method down into manageable steps.
6. **Observation:** Watch and listen to them breathing; this will help you to determine if anyone is struggling with the practice and will allow you to assist them, if necessary.
7. **Encouragement:** Acknowledge when they seem to 'get it'. This is true of any part of the practice (asana, pranayama, meditation, philosophical inquiry, etc). Validation helps us to feel like we are developing a mastery of a new skill. Also encourage relaxation as some more challenging breathing practices may induce tension at first.
8. **Integration:** After they have explored the new breathing practice, consider asking them about their experience. However, never force 'sharing' as some people are shy to share their personal experiences, especially if they believe they didn't 'get it'. Affirm shared experiences and share yours. Include the new breathing practice again at another point in the class as a way to tie it in with asana and meditation.

Pranayama Practices

Begin any breathing practice by coming into a comfortable position – either sitting or lying down. It is important to feel relaxed and to also feel that the spine is in a natural, long, curvy and supported position. Lying down is often more comfortable for Beginner students; this is also true for anyone who might simply feel fatigued, regardless of their yoga experience. Before starting any technique, it's important to take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.

If your students are sitting for the pranayama practice, it is important that they are able to sit upright with a long spine and strong core, without added tension in the upper body and where gravity can support the base of the pose. When the upper body is free of tension, it feels lighter and makes it easier to move the breath. Deep breathing supports the spine; when we inhale the core spinal muscles 'hug' the spine while allowing it to lengthen. Deep breathing also builds core muscles strength.

Simple Breath

The simplest breathing practice is learning to watch the natural flow of breath, without trying to control or change it. Most students are surprised to learn that, by and large, their body is doing the breathing; i.e., that their physical self is breathing them, rather than their mind consciously orchestrating the breathing. In fact, breathing is one of a few bodily functions that

is both involuntary (it happens unconsciously) and voluntary (when we manipulate the breath).

Technique

You can help your students fine tune their awareness by guiding them to consider the following:

- Notice your natural, passive breath and begin to note the rhythm, texture and sound of your breathing. Be aware of the cycles of breathing (every inhalation is followed by an exhalation) and how they are similar yet also different (inhalations feel different than exhalations; no two inhalations are identical; no two exhalations are identical).
- Begin to be aware of the places where you actually feel the breath, where it feels most relaxed and easy and where it feels difficult or blocked.
- Our physical well-being affects our breath and our breath affects our physical well-being. Our breath is affected by our emotional states and they also affect how we breathe. If you feel rushed, agitated, busy, or anxious, the breath is often jagged, short and maybe even erratic. If you feel calm and centered, your breathing is often smooth, deep and even.
- Take time to come to your breath and let your body, mind and emotions settle.

Benefits

- Bringing our awareness to our breath relaxes the physical body, calms the mind and soothes the emotions.
- As the mind becomes absorbed in watching the breath, you develop focus and improve concentration.
- Becoming aware of breathing habits also helps students to discover if they have developed the habit of 'reverse breathing'. Reverse breathing is demonstrated by a drawing in of the belly or chest during inhalations and a release or expansion of the belly/chest during exhalation. When we are breathing 'as designed', there is expansion on the inhalations and compression on the exhalations.

Contraindications and Precautions

There are NO contraindications or precautions for this breathing practice. However, bringing awareness to the breath helps people to become more embodied and/or return back to their physical selves from a place of dissociation and this may trigger anxiety in people who have experienced physical trauma. That being said, the road to healing involves returning consciously back to the embodied self and so, over time, as they feel safe doing so, this will become a more comfortable practice.

Extended Exhalation

Once the Simple Breathing practice is comfortable and familiar, deepening the exhalation follows naturally. At first, allow at least three passive, simple breaths between the Extended Exhalations. As you become more comfortable with the technique, you can extend every other breath and then, eventually, every breath. As your exhalations deepen and lengthen, your inhalations become naturally fuller as well.

Technique

1. Start by watching the movement of your belly as you breathe naturally.
2. When your breathing is quiet and relaxed, begin to notice the natural length of both your inhalations and exhalations.
3. Gradually begin to lengthen your exhalations so that they are twice as long as the inhalations (a ration of 1:2/Inhalations:Exhalations).
4. It may help to imagine the larger/primary breathing muscle, the diaphragm, as a piston that slowly moves up and presses gently on the bottom of your lungs, helping you to dispel stale air (but not to the point of totally emptying the lungs as there is always some air left in the lungs to prevent collapse).
5. You may wish to also gently purse your lips as if you have a large straw between them, through which you are exhaling. This allows for the same amount of exhaling breath while lengthening it out.
6. Eventually, once you feel comfortable with the longer exhalations, begin to gently draw your belly button towards your spine at the end of the exhaling breath. This will help to engage abdominal muscles and help with the lengthening of the exhaling breaths.
7. You might also feel an expansion in the low back part of your spine, especially if you are exploring this breathing practice lying down (ideally with knees bent, feet on the floor).
8. Try to keep the inhalations passive; the effort is on the exhalations.

Benefits

- Massages abdominal muscles, organs and spinal discs
- Strengthens abdominal muscles
- Releases core tension
- Kick-starts the 'relaxation response' which is a necessary state for the body to restore and renew.

Contraindications (i.e., DO NOT PRACTICE)

- if you are experiencing an asthmatic episode

Precautions (i.e., CAN PRACTICE, with modifications)

- if you had recent abdominal surgery, do not engage abdominal muscles
- if you are experiencing 'loose bowels', do not engage abdominal muscles
- if you are in the 1st Trimester of pregnancy, do not actively engage abdominal muscles (to avoid hindering implantation of the fetus and placenta)

Dirgha Pranayama ('Complete Breath')

(also known as *Yogic Breath*, *Full Breath* or *Three-part Breath*)

This practice is done with long, slow, deep breaths with the focus on envisioning the three chambers of the lungs. The first, or lower, chamber borders the abdominal region. You can tell if you're breathing into this area, if your belly inflates like a balloon on the inhalation and relaxes on the exhalation. This is also called 'diaphragmatic' breathing since the natural downward movement of the diaphragm (as you breath in) presses on the internal organs in the abdominal cavity, causing the belly to expand to make space. When the abdomen feels spacious and the breath is deep, slow and even, the nervous system receives the message that 'all is well' and relaxation ensues.

The second, or middle, chamber of the lungs is located in the thoracic region of the ribs and middle chest. When you breathe into this chamber, your rib cage and the associated intercostal muscles between the ribs expand on the inhalations and relax on the exhalations.

The third, or upper, chamber of the lungs is in the clavicular region (named after the clavicle bones or 'collar bones') of the upper chest and shoulders. The breath fills the upper region of the lungs and creates expansion and extension in the pectorals (chest muscles).

Breathing into the three chambers in sequential order allows for the fullest and most complete breathing possible, opening us up to the fullest experience of prana in the body.

Technique

1. Take a few normal breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. As you inhale, notice if you feel your belly inflating, your ribs moving or your upper chest expanding.
3. Try to feel each chamber expanding as the breath moves from the lower chamber, through the middle and into the upper regions (in that order) in a wave-like motion.
4. As you exhale, allow the breath to flow out of the lungs naturally, starting from the top, moving to the middle and releasing from the bottom chamber of the lungs.
5. As you continue, begin to try to lengthen the breath a little bit more at the end of each exhalation. Notice if you feel the back of your waist expanding and your spine lengthening.
6. Continue taking several long, smooth and even breaths in this way.

Teaching Tips

- At the onset of the practice, and in a reclined position, have your students place the palms of their hands first on their lower abdomen as they breath in and out of this area.
- After a few cycles of breath, have them place their hands on the sides of the rib cage while they begin the breath in the abdominal area and then allow the same inhalation to move up to the ribs. They can breath in and out moving from the low belly to the ribs and back down again for a few cycles of breath.
- Finally, have them place one hand on the low belly/abdomen and the other hand on their chest over the collarbones to see if they can feel the full expansion of their lungs and track the full movement of their breath as they breath from the low belly, through the mid-section and up to the top chamber. Then have them breath out in the reverse order.
- Some students are shy about touching themselves in public; offer these students eye pillows to place on the three areas of movement. The contact and weight of the eye

pillows creates a touchstone that helps them to bring their focus to the three areas of their trunk.

Dirgha Pranayama (con't)

- After your students have had some experience in a reclined position, you can guide them to try Dirgha breathing in a seated position. Encourage them to notice any differences in sensations and effort.
- Once students are familiar with Dirgha breathing, you can add *Ujjayi* breathing to increase the depth and length of the breath.

Benefits

- Relaxes the body and calms the mind
- Revitalizes the entire body system
- Brings oxygen to the farthest reaches of the lungs, areas that don't typically receive a fresh supply of oxygen and prana due to habitual shallow breathing.
- Helps students to 'unlearn' shallow breathing habits and learn a new and natural pattern of deep breathing and relaxation.
- Gives the abdominal organs a gentle massage with the contraction and release of the abdominal muscles.
- Improves digestion and elimination; helps to relieve constipation
- Strengthens abdominal muscles, the diaphragm, heart and intercostal muscles
- May soothe cramping discomfort during menstruation
- Can be practiced during postures/asanas, relaxation, meditation and throughout the day.

Contraindications and Precautions: None

Ujjayi Breath (Ocean Breath)

(also known as ***Sounding Breath, Victory Breath***)

Initially this breath is practiced by taking long, slow, deep breaths through the nostrils, while slightly narrowing the back of the throat in the area of the glottis. This subtle muscular contraction creates a hissing sound in the back of the throat that sounds like the rising and falling of the ocean tides. With practice, the sound can be made by fully relaxing the same area of the throat.

Technique

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. Begin taking long, slow, deep breaths in and out through the nostrils.
3. Allow the breath to be gentle and relaxed as you begin to slightly narrow the back of your throat on your exhalations, creating a steady hissing sound.
4. Try not to force the sound as this sometimes creates a choking feeling; allow for a gentle constriction on the back of the throat so that you (and possibly the person sitting next to you) can hear the breath.
5. Continue to lengthen your inhalations and exhalations without creating tension in your body. Allow the sound of the breath to be continuous and smooth.
6. After exploring the constriction on the exhalations, switch over to trying it on the inhalations.
7. Inhaling Ujjayi is a little tricky for many people and can cause anxiety if it feels like it's too hard to breathe in. If you want to stay in a relaxed state, try Ujjayi on the exhalations only.
8. If Ujjayi inhalation is comfortable, you can deepen your practice by creating the constriction on both the inhalations and exhalations.

Teaching Tips

- Demonstrate 'fogging up' a mirror visually by holding your hand in front of your mouth, as if holding a mirror that you are about to fog up. Make the 'fogging up' sound from your throat with your mouth open. Repeat this open-mouthed several times then demonstrate with your mouth closed and exhaling through your nostrils.
- Encourage them to imagine warming up cold hands on a chilly day. Do this with your own hands, exhaling at first through an open mouth into cupped hands and then eventually with mouth closed and exhaling through your nostrils.
- Some students connect more with making 'sounds'. When practicing Ujjayi on the exhalations, have your students try to make the '***Ahhh***' or '***Home***' (minus the 'mmmm') sound in a loud whisper, mouth open. As they become more comfortable, have them try with mouth closed.
- Encourage your students to listen to the sound in the resonant chamber of their own heads. Invite them to allow the breath to become more subtle and refined. This can be very meditative and is a breathing practice often used prior to or during meditation.

Benefits

- Relaxes the body and calms the mind as it becomes absorbed in sounds of breathing.
- Increases concentration and induces meditation by using the sound as a focal point.
- Helps students learn how to breathe more deeply and fully.
- Stimulates circulation and metabolism.
- Increases flow of prana

- Opens the alveoli in the lungs, allowing for more absorption of oxygen.

Contraindications and Precautions: None

Simhasana (Lion's Breath)

Simhasana is a strong, forceful and stimulating breathing practice. It is useful when you have pent up energy or are feeling strong emotions that you need to express in a safe and helpful way. The force behind the breath helps to discharge emotional energy, rather than suppressing it in the body. Once you are comfortable with this technique, you can use it in postures that require dynamic energy or emotional release.

Technique

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. As you exhale, stick out your tongue as far as you can, trying to touch the tip of your tongue to the bottom of your chin.
3. At the same time, make a loud noise, like a lion's roar!
4. Inhale passively through your nostrils and with the mouth closed, tongue in your mouth.
5. After a few cycles of this active breathing, you can add a lift of the eyes to the ceiling/sky to activate the upper facial muscles.
6. Continue with this breathing practice for as long as you want and return to natural breathing when you are ready.

Benefits

- Relaxes muscles of the face, tongue and jaw
- Releases pent up energy
- Removes phlegm from the throat and soothes a sore throat (if done mindfully)

Contraindications and Precautions: None

Kapalabhati (Breath of Fire or Shining Skull Breath)

'Kapala' means skull. 'Bhati' means "to make shiny" or "to clean". Through the rapid succession of sharp exhalations, the nasal passages are cleaned and purified. The cerebral spinal fluid, which changes pressure according to the rhythms of breathing, receives a tremendous shift in pressure through the swift and sharp exhalations. This, in turn, creates a massaging effect on the brain, enlivening every cell and creating a feeling a light and vitality around the skull.

Kapalabhati is not a Beginner practice. Guide your students through Pranayama starting with the easiest breathing practices and increasing the challenge gradually: Eg., start with Simple Breath, move onto Dirgha, then Extended Exhale. After these traditionally 'beginner' practices, there are many other options to keep your students engaged.

What is really happening?

Fast breathing is essentially hyperventilation that, unrestrained, robs the brain of oxygen. Fast breathing causes blasts of air with incredibly low concentrations of CO₂ (carbon dioxide) to rush out of the lungs which, in turn, **lowers levels of CO₂ in the lungs**. The body responds by **drawing more CO₂ out of the bloodstream** and into the lungs to establish homeostasis. This lowers the levels of CO₂ in the bloodstream throughout the entire body **WITHOUT** significantly increasing oxygen stores. This, in turn, **causes the blood vessels in the brain to contract**, reducing flow of oxygen to the brain and producing light-headedness and sometimes blurred vision or, **in extreme cases, passing out**.

Dramatic lowering of CO₂ levels in the bloodstream throughout the body heightens excitability of nerves and muscles, producing tingling in hands and spasms in muscles. The feeling of exhilaration and the excitability of the nervous system creates heightened awareness of potential danger. For Beginners still trying to learn how to notice their breath and breathe deeply, this can be problematic. However, studies of advanced students showed that after 30-60 mins of 'high frequency breathing' there was little change in CO₂ levels.

Once you feel your students are ready to explore Kapalabhati for the first time, it is recommended they do so sitting down as close to the ground as possible in case they experience dizziness. Advanced practitioners may be able to incorporate Kapalabhati into challenging yoga postures, if they feel they can do so without getting dizzy.

Technique

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. When inhaling, allow your belly to expand; when exhaling, allow your belly to move back sharply as you expel the air through your nose.
3. Relax and release your belly after exhaling to allow the next inhale to happen naturally.
4. At the beginning, try this method of breathing for 5 – 10 breaths and at a slower rhythm.
5. Once you feel comfortable with the stronger exhalation, passive inhalation and purposeful movement of the abdomen, gradually increase the number of breaths and find a measured pace that feels easy, without creating any stress or exertion.
6. It is important to rest in between rounds with at least 1 - 2 complete and slow full breaths.
7. When you are ready to end the practice, extend your final exhalation to match the length of your slower, passive inhalations.

Teaching Tips

- To begin, have your students pay attention to the movements of their abdomen when they are breathing naturally to determine if they are 'reverse breathing' (belly sinks in while inhaling and releases while exhaling). If so, have them try either *Dirgha Breath* or *Extended Exhale* to help them re-learn how to breathe naturally.
- The emphasis is on the *exhalation*. The inhalations are passive; i.e., they will happen naturally due to the change in pressure between the lungs and the outside air.
- If a student becomes short of breath, feels light-headed or loses their rhythm, invite them to return to Simple breathing until they no longer feel dizzy.
- It may be advisable to have a box of tissues available as the forceful expulsion of air from the nostrils, combined with the warming decongestion of sinuses may cause leakage!

Benefits

- Clears out stale, residual air in the lungs.
- Purifies the body by releasing large amounts of CO₂, cellular waste and toxins.
- Energizes, revitalizes and stimulates the entire body system with prana.
- Creates mental alertness.
- Gives a stimulating massage to abdominal organs.
- Strengthens the diaphragm, heart, lungs and abdominal muscles.

Contraindications (i.e., DO NOT PRACTICE)

- if you have unmedicated high blood pressure, heart disease, or history of strokes
- if you have a hiatal or inguinal hernia or active gastric ulcer
- if you have been diagnosed with epilepsy
- if you are experiencing vertigo, a migraine headache, or significant nosebleeds
- if you have a detached retina, glaucoma
- if you have undergone recent abdominal surgery or a recent abdominal injury
- if you have a chronic condition with any digestive or abdominal organs
- if you have acute emphysema

Precautions (i.e., CAN PRACTICE, with modifications)

- *Menstruation:* This may increase blood flow; therefore, if you are experiencing a heavy menses flow, either stay with lighter movements or explore *Extended Exhale* instead.
- *Eye or Ear Issues:* The increase in pressure may aggravate existing conditions; therefore, stay with lighter movements or explore *Extended Exhale* instead.
- *Blood pressure:* If medicated high blood pressure or chronically low blood pressure, practice mindfully. If you begin to experience dizziness, nausea or change in vision, return to natural breathing to bring your body back to balance and then explore *Extended Exhalation* or *Dirgha Breath* instead.
- *Nervous system:* If practiced rapidly, this stimulates the sympathetic nervous system that is connected to the 'stress response'. Some research suggests a slower pace prevents this from happening.

NOTE: Individuals who insisted on practicing over-forceful and rapid *Kapalabhati* for prolonged periods of time have caused themselves lung collapse and, in some documented cases, heart attacks.

Bhastrika (Bellows Breath)

Bhastrika means a bellows used to stoke a fire by drawing air forcibly in and out, causing the fire to burn more brightly (air drawn into the fire) or subside (air pulled out of the fire). As with Kapalabhati, Bhastrika is a form of 'hyperventilation' and should be practiced with care and only by individuals without pre-existing conditions that might be aggravated by the practice. Bhastrika can become a dangerous practice if an individual over-forces the breath and practices for prolonged periods of time.

Technique

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. When inhaling, allow your belly to expand sharply; when exhaling, allow your belly to move back sharply as you breathe through your nose.
3. Practice mindfully and with awareness to help you find an easy rhythm, balance and sense of evenness in the inhalations and exhalations.
4. When first learning this breath, try 5 – 10 slow cycles.
5. Once you feel comfortable with the stronger inhalations and exhalations and the purposeful movement of the abdomen, gradually increase the number of breaths and find a measured pace that feels easy, without creating any stress or exertion.
6. You may wish to explore one round of this type of breathing or a number of sets, resting in between rounds with a few cycles of Ujjayi breathing to give your lungs and diaphragm a rest.
7. When you are ready to end the practice, extend your final exhalation then move into Ujjayi breathing.

Teaching Tips

- If you notice that students are losing their rhythm, invite them to switch to Simple Breath, Extended Exhale or Ujjayi breathing until they feel ready to begin again.
- If a student reports feeling dizzy, nauseous or has a change in vision, instruct them to stop the Bhastrika breathing and return to Ujjayi then Simple breathing while lying in Savasana.
- It may be advisable to have a box of tissues available as the forceful expulsion of air from the nostrils, combined with the warming decongestion of the sinuses may cause some leakage!

Benefits

- See 'Kapalabhati'

Contraindications (i.e., DO NOT PRACTICE)

- See 'Kapalabhati'

Precautions (i.e., CAN PRACTICE, with modifications)

- See 'Kapalabhati'

Alternate Nostril Breathing Variations

Alternate Nostril breathing alternates the breath between the left and right nostrils. It balances the left and right sides of our bodies, the right and left brain hemispheres and the two energy channels (*nadis*) of *Ida* (left/feminine channel) and *Pingala* (right/masculine channel) that intertwine around the central energy channel (the *Sushumna*). Any of the following variations are generally suitable for everyone and can be an effective way to calm the body/mind prior to meditation or asana practice; however, students experiencing acute breathing problems may find 'single-nostril' breathing aggravates breathing difficulties and is anxiety provoking. Invite them to try Dirgha Breath instead.

There are variations to this breathing practice depending on which nadis/channel you want to activate/nourish. The various practices are usually done with the right hand in **Vishnu Mudra**. This mudra is done by curling your index and middle fingers into the fleshy part of your palm by the base of the thumb. If this is too difficult a position for students who may be experiencing pain in their finger joints, the index and middle finger tips can be placed lightly on the 3rd Eye Chakra instead. When using the right hand, the thumb is used to gently block off the right nostril while your ring and pinky fingers are used together to block off the left nostril.

Alternate Nostril Exhalation

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. INHALE naturally through BOTH nostrils.
3. CLOSE the RIGHT nostril and EXHALE out the LEFT.
4. INHALE again through BOTH nostrils.
5. CLOSE the LEFT nostril and EXHALE out the RIGHT.
6. Continue this pattern for as long as is comfortable then return to natural breathing.

Alternate Nostril Inhalation

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. EXHALE naturally through BOTH nostrils.
3. CLOSE the RIGHT nostril and INHALE through the LEFT.
4. EXHALE again through BOTH nostrils.
5. CLOSE the LEFT nostril and INHALE through the RIGHT.
6. Continue this pattern for as long as is comfortable then return to natural breathing.

Benefits

- Creates whole brain functioning by balancing right and left brain hemispheres.
- Gently purifies the Ida and Pingala Nadi, or energy channels.
- Very grounding; creates deep sense of well-being, physically, emotionally and mentally.
- Helps to focus for prolonged periods of time or when you are feeling anxious.

Contraindications: (*i.e., DO NOT PRACTICE*)

- If a student has recently broken their nose, any pressure on the nose may increase their discomfort and create anxiety.

Precautions: (*i.e., CAN PRACTICE, with modifications*)

- If a student is suffering from a deviated septum, rather than completely block a nostril, they may want to partially block so they can still breathe comfortably.

Surya Bhedda (Right Nostril/Sun Channel Inhalation)

****This practice is warming and energizing****

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. EXHALE naturally through BOTH nostrils.
3. CLOSE your LEFT nostril and INHALE through the RIGHT.
4. At the end of your inhalation, CLOSE the RIGHT nostril, RELEASE and EXHALE through the LEFT.
5. At the end of your exhalation, CLOSE your LEFT nostril, RELEASE and INHALE through the RIGHT.
6. Continue this pattern for as long as is comfortable then finish the practice with an EXHALATION to return to natural breathing.

Chandra Bhedda (Left Nostril/Moon Channel Inhalation)

****This practice is cooling and quieting****

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. EXHALE naturally through BOTH nostrils.
3. CLOSE your RIGHT nostril and INHALE through the LEFT.
4. At the end of your inhalation, CLOSE the LEFT nostril, RELEASE and EXHALE through the RIGHT.
5. At the end of your exhalation, CLOSE your RIGHT nostril, RELEASE and INHALE through the LEFT.
6. Continue this pattern for as long as is comfortable then finish the practice with an EXHALATION to return to natural breathing.

Benefits: Same as previous variations.

Contraindications and Precautions: See previous variations.

Nadi Shodhana (Full Alternate Nostril Breathing)

This breathing technique combines the previous variations, changing nostrils at the end of the inhalation or exhalation (once again, depending on what nadis you wish to activate). Changing after the exhalation is grounding and cooling and brings your awareness down to the lower two chakras. Changing after the inhalation is stimulating and warming and brings your awareness and energy to the upper five chakras.

Alternating After the Inhalation

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. INHALE through BOTH nostrils.
3. CLOSE the RIGHT nostril and EXHALE then INHALE through the LEFT.
4. CLOSE the LEFT nostril and EXHALE then INHALE through the RIGHT.
5. CLOSE the RIGHT nostril and EXHALE out the LEFT. At this point, you have completed one full round of the breathing pattern/cycle.
6. Continue crossing from one nostril to the other AFTER INHALING for as long as you are comfortable.
7. Finish with an EXHALATION through the LEFT nostril and return to natural breathing.

Alternating After the Exhalation

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. EXHALE through BOTH nostrils.
3. CLOSE the RIGHT nostril and INHALE then EXHALE through the LEFT.
4. CLOSE the LEFT nostril and INHALE then EXHALE through the RIGHT.
5. CLOSE the RIGHT nostril and INHALE through the LEFT. At this point, you have completed one full round of the breathing pattern/cycle.
6. Continue crossing from one nostril to the other AFTER EXHALING for as long as you are comfortable.
7. Finish with an EXHALATION through the LEFT nostril and return to natural breathing.

Benefits: Same as previous variations.

Contraindications and Precautions: Same as previous variations.

Alternate Nostril Kapalabhati

This breathing technique is NOT a Beginner practice. It is practiced much like Kapalabhati except that the forced exhalations occur when you're alternating on the exhalation.

Technique

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. CLOSE the RIGHT nostril and EXHALE rapidly through the LEFT, followed by a passive INHALATION through the same LEFT nostril.
3. CLOSE the LEFT nostril and EXHALE rapidly through the RIGHT, followed by a passive INHALATION through the same RIGHT nostril.
4. This completes one full cycle of the breathing pattern. Continue to repeat the pattern for as long as you are comfortable, always switching nostrils after the passive INHALATION.
5. When you are ready to finish the practice, make the final EXHALE through the LEFT nostril stronger and slower then return to natural breathing.
6. Try to work your way up to 10 – 15 cycles per round and remember to take at least 1 – 2 full, slow natural breaths through BOTH nostrils between rounds.

Teaching Tips

- You may wish to practice and teach this breathing technique in gradual steps by closing the right nostril and practicing Kapalabhati entirely out of the left nostril for 8 – 10 breaths then try Kapalabhati entirely out of the right nostril only as a way of giving your students the experiencing of forcefully exhaling out of a single nostril (remember to include the passive inhalations between each of the exhalations so your students don't pass out!).
- You can then graduate to exploring Kapalabhati for 4 cycles through the left nostril only then switch to the right nostril for 4 cycles; then 2 through the left, 2 through the right and eventually making your way to 1 cycle of exhaling/inhaling so that you are alternating after each single inhalation.

Benefits: See 'Kapalabhati' and previous Alternate Nostril variations.

Contraindications and Precautions: See 'Kapalabhati' and previous Alternate Nostril variations.

Kumbhaka (Breath Retention)

In the practice of pranayama, there are 3 parts to every breath: inhalation (Puraka), exhalation (Rechaka) and the natural pause between them (Kumbhaka). When we purposefully exaggerate or extend that natural pause (either after an inhalation or an exhalation), it becomes a form of breath retention or Kumbhaka. Breath retention creates an experience of stillness within the body/mind.

Technique

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. INHALE slowly, then pause or RETAIN the breath.
3. Stay relaxed and passive; release unnecessary tension, keep spine long and curvy.
4. As you retain the breath, imagine your body becoming more spacious because of the prana you are holding within you.
5. EXHALE slowly.
6. Continue with this breathing pattern for as long as you comfortably can then return to natural breathing.

Teaching Tips

- Begin by noticing how long you can comfortably pause the breath then gradually lengthen those pauses over time.
- There are a variety of rhythms for Kumbhaka pranayama. The classical pattern is INHALING for a count of 5, PAUSING the breath for a count of 15, EXHALING for a count of 10. This is a ratio of 1:3:2
- Take time to build up to more advanced rhythms by gradually increasing the lengths of the retention.

Advanced Practices

- If you are comfortable pausing after the exhale: INHALE for 5; RETAIN for 10; EXHALE for 10; RETAIN for 5. This is a ratio of 1:2:2:1
- *Different ratio:* INHALE for 4; RETAIN for 16; EXHALE for 8. This is a ratio of 1:4:2
- *Alternate Nostril variation:*
 - While exploring Full Nadi Shodhana, try holding the breath after inhalations then try holding after exhalations

Benefits

- Calms and quiets the body and mind
- Increases breathing capacity

Contraindications: (i.e., DO NOT PRACTICE)

- if you have un-medicated high blood pressure
- if you have heart, lung, eye or ear conditions
- if you are pregnant

Precautions: (i.e., CAN PRACTICE, with modifications)

- if you have medicated high blood pressure and begin to feel dizzy or nauseas, switch to Simple or Dirgha Breathing.

Viloma (Interval Breathing)

In *Viloma* breathing, the inhalation and/or exhalation are not continuous but, rather, are divided into segments by a series of pauses, or *Kumbhaka*. The pauses give you time at various stages of breathing to observe and explore the qualities of your breath. It may begin to feel like a series of stepping stones.

Since there are lower risks with *Interval Exhalations*, it's best to start with that variation. This gives you something to try if you have health issues that would prevent you from trying *Interval Inhalations*. Once you are comfortable with segmenting either the inhalations or exhalations, you may wish to combine them, pausing throughout both the inhalations and exhalations for a complete cycle of breath.

Interval Exhalations

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. Notice the length of your EXHALATIONS and begin to divide up your exhalations in equal segments, separated by pauses for the same length. For example, if your exhaling breath is generally taking 6 beats, then your rhythm would be EXHALE for 2, PAUSE for 2, continue EXHALING for 2, PAUSE for 2, EXHALE for 2 (or whatever length of breath is left).
3. Take a deep breath in before beginning to divide your next exhalation.
4. Continue with this pattern, dividing your exhalations for as long as you are comfortable and then return to natural breathing.

Interval Inhalations

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. Notice the length of your INHALATIONS and begin to divide up your inhalations in equal segments, separated by pauses for the same length. For example, if your inhaling breath is generally taking 6 beats, then your rhythm would be INHALE for 2, PAUSE for 2, continue INHALING for 2, PAUSE for 2, INHALE for 2 (or whatever length of breath is left).
3. Take a long breath out before beginning to divide your next inhalation.
4. Continue with this pattern, dividing your inhalations for as long as you are comfortable and then return to natural breathing.

Benefits

- Energizes the body and mind.
- Increases capacity to breathe more fully.
- Prepares you for longer pauses when practicing *Kumbhaka* (breath retention).

Contraindications: (i.e., DO NOT PRACTICE)

- if you have un-medicated high blood pressure or dangerously low blood pressure
- if you have heart, lung, eye or ear conditions
- if you are pregnant

Precautions: (i.e., CAN PRACTICE, with modifications)

- if you have medicated high blood pressure and begin to feel dizzy or nauseas, switch to Simple or *Dirgha* Breathing

Sama Vritti (Square Breath)

In this pranayama you pause at the end of a complete inhalation and at the end of a complete exhalation. The length of all the sections (inhaling, pausing, exhaling, pausing) is the same. Many people report that it feels like they are creating a square with their breathing pattern. Some people report that it feels like they are surfing waves where the inhalation is the movement up one side of a wave, the pause is the crest of the wave, the exhalation is like riding down the back of the wave and the next pause like the valley you rest in before the next wave arrives. Invite your students to be open to whatever imagery works for them.

Technique

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. Notice the natural length of your inhalations and exhalations and find a length that works for both.
3. Begin to insert a pause of the same length after the inhalation and exhalations.
4. You may find as you become more familiar with this pattern that you feel calmer and able to breathe in and out and pause for longer lengths.
5. Remember to make all four parts of the breathing of equal length.
6. Continue with this pattern for as long as you are comfortable and then return to natural breathing.

Teaching Tips

- Try to think of the pauses between each breath as a 'pause' rather than a hard 'holding'
- Soften and release tension during each of the pauses
- Another possibly helpful imagery is to imagine you are riding a bicycle up and down gentle hills. The easy pedaling up the hill is your inhalation, the crest of the hill is your pause, the gentle ride down is your exhalation and the valley at the bottom (and before you begin climbing the next easy hill) is another pause.

Benefits

- Stabilizing and grounding
- Increases capacity for full breathing
- Prepares you for longer pauses when practicing Kumbhaka (breath retention).

Contraindications: (i.e., DO NOT PRACTICE)

- if you have un-medicated high blood pressure
- if you have heart, lung, eye or ear conditions
- if you are pregnant

Precautions: (i.e., CAN PRACTICE, with modifications)

- if you have medicated high blood pressure and begin to feel dizzy or nauseas, don't pause between inhaling and exhaling. Simply focus on gently making your breaths longer.

Sitali and Sitakari/Sitkari (Cooling and Hissing Breaths)

These breathing techniques use the passage of air over the tongue and teeth to cool the body. In Sitali the mouth is open slightly and the sides of the tongue are curled inwards as you breathe in. In Sitakari, the teeth are lightly closed, the tongue remains flat and the breath is drawn in between the teeth, creating a hissing sound. In both cases, there is a cooling sensation created in the mouth.

Technique

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. Exhale naturally then:
 - a. If practicing ***Sitali***:
 - i. as you inhale, stick your tongue out, curl in the sides and suck the air through the channel you've created with your tongue (as if you were drinking from a fountain).
 - ii. The more saliva you have trapped in the channel, the cooler the sensation.
 - iii. The further you can stick out your tongue, the greater the release of tension at the back of your throat.
 - iv. When exhaling, relax your tongue, close your mouth and exhale out your nose.
 - b. If practicing ***Sitakari***:
 - i. as you inhale, lightly close your teeth, draw back your lips and inhale through your teeth. This creates a hissing sound.
 - ii. When exhaling, relax your teeth and lips, close your mouth and exhale out your nose.

Teaching Tips

- A percentage of the population is genetically unable to curl in the sides of their tongues. If you have a student who cannot do this, offer them the Sitakari version.
- Some students have sensitive teeth and find it painful to breathe through slightly closed teeth. If you have someone who suffers from this, offer them the Sitali version.

Benefits

- Cools the body
- Releases tension from the throat, mouth and face

Contraindications and Precautions: None

Bhramari (Bee's Breath or Humming Breath)

In this breathing technique, the exhalation is accompanied by a humming sound, like the buzzing of a bee or the hum of an engine. You can get the feeling of it by making a buzzing sound and feeling the vibration in your lips and teeth.

Technique

1. Take a few natural breaths to establish an easy, steady rhythm.
2. Upon exhaling, exhale through your mouth, letting your lips vibrate to produce a gentle buzzing sound.
3. Continue to inhale naturally between exhalations.
4. You can change where you feel the vibrations by changing the position of your tongue. Start by placing the tip of your tongue behind your top/front teeth and then move the tip back along the top of your mouth (the palate) towards your throat.
5. Notice if you can feel the vibrations spread down your spine.
6. ***Variation:*** While buzzing on the exhalation, create gentle pressing pulsations on the semi-circular cartilage that faces the inner ear.

Teaching Tips

- This technique often produces laughter among students and can be a natural and practical way to release tension. Let the practice be playful!
- As you become more comfortable making the buzzing sound, focus on the vibration in other parts of your body.
- Place your hands on your lips, neck, shoulders and spine and notice if you can feel the vibration transfer into your hands.
- If you start to feel light-headed, place your hands on the ground, open your eyes and return to natural breathing.

Benefits

- Releases tensions and blockages much like ultrasound vibrations can break up kidney and gallstones.

Contraindications and Precautions: None

Pranayama Quick Reference Guide

Simple Breath

- Observe the natural flow and rhythm of your breath.

Extended Exhalation

- Lengthen the exhaling breath while *gently* drawing the belly back towards the spine.

Dirgha (*Three-part Breath, Yogic Breath, Full Breath*)

- Can be practiced lying down, seated or in a specific yoga posture
- As guidance, place hands on low belly, ribs, and collarbone areas to feel flow of breath

Ujjayi (*Ocean Breath*)

- Can be explored on exhalations only, inhalations only, or both
- Easiest to begin with mouth open then eventually closed and breathing through nostrils
- Verbal cues: 'Fog the mirror'; 'Ahhhh' sound on exhale; 'Om' sound on inhale

Simhasana (*Lion's Breath*)

- Prolonged energetic exhale ('haaaah') with tongue fully out
- Eyes look up to ceiling
- *For fun:* Claws open!

Kapalabhati (*Breath of Fire, Shining Skull Breath*)

- Remember to share Contraindications BEFORE teaching.
- For Beginners, place hands on abdomen to feel active movement of belly
- Focus on short exhalations; don't forget to inhale between each exhale!
- Start slowly and with a few breaths (1 – 3 cycles)
- Work up to a moderate pace to 10 – 20 cycles, as appropriate

Bhastrika (*Bellows Breath*)

- Remember to share Contraindications BEFORE teaching.
- For Beginners, place hands on abdomen to feel active movement of belly
- Even rhythm of short, active exhalations followed by short, active inhalations
- Start slowly and with a few breaths (1 – 3 cycles)
- Work up to a moderate pace to 10 – 20 cycles, as appropriate

Nadi Shodhana (*Alternate Nostril Breathing*)

- Breathe as naturally as possible while alternating
- Support 'working' arm, if needed
- Slow down and soften inhalations and exhalations
- Establish your own natural rhythm before attempting 'counting' and 'ratios' variations

Viloma (*Interval Breathing*)

- Can be practiced on exhalations only, inhalations only, or both
- Gently lengthen the breath then count while breathing to determine comfortable length
- *Divide the breath into equal parts:* breathing, pausing, breathing, pausing, etc.

Sama Vritti (*Square or Wave Breath*)

- Find a comfortable length for inhaling and exhaling
- Insert pause of same length after inhales and exhales

Sitali and Sitakari (*Cooling Breaths*)

- Sitali: Inhaling air and saliva through a curled tongue
- Sitakari: Inhaling air between slightly closed teeth

Bhramari (*Bee Breath*)

- Make the sound of a buzzing bee by exhaling while allowing lips to vibrate
- *Variation:* Put slight, pulsing pressure on crescent-shaped cartilage at front of ears