



Home	Up	Class Schedule	
Homework	Private Sessions	Workshop Schedule	Workshops Offered
Yoga Teacher Training	ResearchService	Co-Listening is a Kripalu	Yoga Information
Referral Page	Sundays	Buddhism Basics	Find a Teacher
Related Links	Inspiration	Products for Sale	Humor: Yoga Bloopers

Locate information on yoga, breathing techniques, nutrition, health, yogic philosophy, merchandise, and related links at Focal Point Yoga, a well-organized site featuring consistently updated information on Yoga, Meditation, Kids Yoga, Children's Yoga, Kripalu, Ashtanga, Astanga, yoga books, Nutrition, Body/Mind, Spirit, driste, pranayama, breath, breathe, breathing techniques, yamas, niyamas, health, nutrition, meditation, Massachusetts, MA, Ma., Mass., M.A., yoga classes, digestion, philosophy, relaxation, Yoga Mats

Up

On this web site, we cover seven pranayama techniques: Abdominal Breathing, Dirgha Pranayama, Ujjayi Pranayama, Nadi Shodhana, Kapalabhati, Breath of Fire, and Anoloma Veloma. These are all used to achieve different results. The basic foundational breaths to master are Abdominal Breathing, Dirgha Pranayama, Ujjayi Pranayama and Nadi Shodhana. Until you master these techniques, do not try the other, more esoteric practices. These four lay the groundwork for the others, and are the most commonly used breaths in yoga. They are also very powerful breathing techniques, so gradually build your practice and follow the common sense guidelines below before trying these techniques.

Basic Guidelines

1. Blow your nose, clearing your nostrils as much as possible before beginning.
2. Begin practicing pranayama in a room-temperature (68 degrees Fahrenheit) environment. Extremely cold or hot air can affect your health adversely. Also, please do this in FRESH air - no smoke, chemicals, or other harmful elements in your environment. Air will be pulled more deeply into your lungs, and it need to be clean and fresh.

3. Breathe through the nostrils only, unless otherwise specified.
4. The fluidity of your breath is the priority - if your breath begins to be choppy or uneven, stop what you are doing and allow your breath to return to its own, natural rhythm.
5. If you begin to feel faint, dizzy, flushed, or light-headed, stop what you are doing, and allow your breath to return to its own natural rhythm. This is a result of the increased oxygen levels in the body, which your body may not be accustomed to. You can increase your pranayama practice and use of oxygen gradually.
6. Be careful if you have any heart condition, asthma, bronchitis, high or low blood pressure, or any physical condition that requires you to be under medical supervision.

PRANAYAMA TECHNIQUES

Abdominal Breath - also called the "Diaphragmatic Breath", "Natural Breath"

How to learn it: Lie flat on your back in Savasana, the corpse pose (resting on your back, arms by your sides, palms facing up). Begin to draw your awareness to your breath - slow and deep. Become aware of your abdomen - feeling it softly rise as you inhale and fall as you exhale. Notice your breath moving throughout your body, nourishing your body. Keep your mouth closed, and draw the air into the body through the nostrils. Bring one hand onto your belly. As you inhale, your belly should rise, filling with air like a balloon (technically, the belly does not fill with air - it is the movement of your diaphragm up and out, drawing air into the lungs, which causes the belly to rise, but visualization is a powerful technique - so think of it as the belly filling with air as you inhale. As you exhale, feel the breath leaving the body, abdomen sinking down, hollowing the belly. Inhale, breath fills the belly, lifting your hands as you breathe, exhale, the belly falls, a soft gentle hollow in the abdomen. Relax your face - release the inner corners of your eyes. Soften and relax the throat. Allow the chest to open, heart forward, shoulders relaxing back - not needing to hold any tension. Feel your stomach and abdomen soften, and relax the digestive organs. Just breathe, deeply into the abdomen, all the way down into your pelvis. Find the rhythm of breath that is fluid, smooth, and relaxing for your body.

What is happening? The lungs have no muscle of their own. Lungs are like two loose empty sacks - they cannot draw air in on their own. The movement of the diaphragm draws air into and out of the body.

The diaphragm is a large muscle that separates the rib cage and its organs from the abdominal cavity. The diaphragm works like a bellows. As the diaphragm moves down from the base of the ribs, air is drawn through the nostrils, through the trachea and bronchial tubes, and into the many small sacs linking the lungs. As air is drawn into the lungs, they fill and expand, expanding the rib cage, lifting the surface of the abdomen up. A more controlled and conscious movement of the diaphragm draws air more deeply into the lungs, allowing the alveoli (small sacs lining the inner surface of the lungs) to extract oxygen from the air and pass it into the blood stream. The alveoli exchange carbon dioxide and other waste gases, passing them back into the lungs to be exhaled by the body. Then, the diaphragm contract upward, and with the help of the intercostal muscles between your ribs pinching the rib cage closed as the diaphragm moves up, the waste gases are pushed out of the lungs.

Why do it? Abdominal breathing relaxes the nervous system, reducing stress and tension, calming the mind. It massages and tones the internal organs - particularly the digestive organs. This style of breathing is efficient, so it requires less effort for the heart and lungs to oxygenate the body, so they can rest more.

Dirgha Pranayama - (pronounced "dear-gah) also called the "Yogic Breath", "Three-part breath" and "Complete Breath"

How to learn it: Once you have mastered Abdominal Breathing, move on to Dirgha Pranayama. Come to a comfortable seated position with the spine straight, and the front of the body expanded (not crunching the belly or caving in the ribs) - Shoulders down and back, Chest open. Place one hand on your belly, and one on the side of your rib cage. Begin Abdominal Breathing. Feel the belly rise as you inhale, lifting your hand up. After the breath fills the belly, draw breath into the rib cage, feeling the expansion of the ribs OUTWARD as the chest opens and the lungs fill. Now exhale, allowing the breath to leave the ribs then the belly. Inhale, bringing air into the bottom of the pelvis, filling the belly. Continue inhaling, filling the rib cage, opening and expanding the rib cage upward and out to the sides, feeling the expansion with your hand on the side of the ribs. Exhale from the rib cage, then the belly. Once you have mastered this portion of the breathing technique, move onto the full Dirgha breath. Inhale into the belly, deeply filling the abdomen - then the breath fills the rib cage, expanding the ribs and then draw the breath all the way up to the chest and the clavicles, actually feeling your clavicles (collar bones) rise slightly as you completely fill the lungs all the way to the top - filling the body with air from the base to the top of the lungs, like water in a

pitcher. When you think you have completely filled the lungs, sip in a little more air through your nostrils. Then exhale slowly, allowing the breath to spill from the body from the clavicles (shoulders), chest, rib cage, and finally the abdomen hollowing, drawing the belly button towards your spine, pulling the diaphragm in and up the body. As you exhale, contract the abdominal muscles in, to make sure you squeeze out all the stale air. Continue breathing this way, drawing air into the bottom of the lungs, filling the belly, then the rib cage, then the upper chest, and exhaling, breath leaving the chest, ribs, then belly. This is Dirgha pranayama - the yogic three-part breath.

What is happening? The diaphragm is drawing air deep into the lungs, expanding the rib cage, as you breath more fully, the rib cage expands even more, and as the lungs fill completely, the breath is in the upper chest, lifting the clavicles slightly. Dirgha breathing draws air deeply into the lungs, allowing a larger number of the alveoli (the worker in your lungs, removing waste gases in exchange for fresh healthy oxygen in your blood stream) to be utilized. This breath tends to be slower and deeper, allowing the alveoli more time to do their job, which allows a greater percentage of the oxygen in each breath to be utilized, making the oxygen exchange in the blood a more efficient process. As you exhale, the intercostal muscles (muscles between the ribs) contract, as the diaphragm contracts, pushing the stale air and waste gases up and out of the body. The abdominal muscles contract, supporting and strengthening the push of the diaphragm. A little bonus - a gentle abdominal workout, strengthening your abs as you breathe!

Why do it? Dirgha increases your lung capacity, improving athletic performance as well as overall good health. It uses the full capacity of the lungs to Dirgha draws air fully into the lungs in a slow, deep breath that allows for efficient oxygen utilization and waste gas removal. It keeps the chest and lungs flexible and relaxed. It increases energy (thanks to a greater oxygen absorption by the body), and improves metabolism. This breath is reputed to improve digestion and elimination, and stimulate the entire body.

Ujjayi Pranayama - (pronounced OOOO-jah-yeee) "Ocean Sounding" or "Victorious" breath (in Kids Yoga we call it the "Darth Vader" breath) The sound created by this breath has been described as a "soft hissing sound" or a "gentle snore." I prefer to think of it in a softer way - I smile and feel the breath swirling around the back of the throat and listen to the soft, whispering sound like wind in the trees, or like a seashell.

When to use this breath: This in one of the most important breathing techniques in yoga. This breath is used for several purposes.

1. During meditation, Ujjayi is used to focus the mind and increase awareness, as it relaxes the body. For meditation and relaxation, the exhalation is longer than the inhalation. The slow, lengthened exhalation of this Ujjayi technique can be used to lower blood pressure and slow heart rate.
2. This is the primary breathing technique used in Ashtanga Yoga and Power Yoga. It increases body heat and focuses the mind. In Power or Ashtanga Yoga practice, the inhalation and exhalation are the same length. To do this, the exhalation is slightly more forceful, and the sound of the breath resonates in the back of the throat.
3. This breath is particularly useful for the following physical concerns: insomnia (Ujjayi breath relaxes the body, calms the mind, and lulls you into a deep restful state), pain reduction (focusing on the breath here helps the body relax, easing symptoms of pain), and to increase low blood pressure (the forceful inhalation/exhalation Ujjayi technique used in Power Yoga increases the body heat and raises blood pressure slightly).

How to learn it: First come to a comfortable seated position, with your back straight, spine long, and nostrils clear (it is useful to blow your nose before beginning this technique). There are two primary techniques used to learn this breath: try them both and see which works best for you.

Sounding - Take a few long, slow, deep breaths through the nostrils and relax. Release all tension in the body. Lengthen your inhalation and exhalation as much as is comfortable. Allow the sound of the breath to begin to make a soft hissing sound as you inhale and exhale. Make the hissing sound smooth and continuous. Through your mouth, whisper the sound "home" as you exhale. Draw the "mmm . . ." sound out as long as possible, making a hissing sound. Now whisper the word "home" as you inhale and exhale, still drawing out the "mmm . . ." sound more and more. Now let go of the first part of the word, and exhale only the "mmm . . ." sound several times - with your mouth closed. Listen to the sound of your breath - keep it smooth and even. With practice, you will be able to whisper the sound through the nostrils evenly during the inhalation and exhalation. Continue deep, steady, long breaths, listening to the sound of your breathing. It is easier to learn this technique during the exhalation than during the inhalation. Practice during the exhalation, and eventually you will be able to apply it during the inhalation as well. I also like to say "Haaaaaahhhh" to learn this breath - find what works for you.

Fogging a Mirror - Hold the palm of your hand a few inches away

from your mouth, in front of your face. Imagine that you are holding a mirror that you are about to fog up with your breath. Exhale slowly through the open mouth onto your imaginary mirror, imagining that you are fogging the mirror with your breath. Notice the whispering, hissing sound naturally made as you "fog your mirror" - a "haaaahhh!" sound. Repeat this breath several times, still "fogging your mirror" through the open mouth, and noticing the sound. Now, close your mouth, and exhale, "fogging the mirror" with the breath from your NOSTRILS, still making that soft whispering sound. Feel the slight constriction of the glottis at the back of your throat as you make this sound. Relax your hand (mirror) back down, and continue this breath. As you become comfortable making this hissing/gentle snoring sound through the nostrils as you exhale, fogging your imaginary mirror, begin practicing making the sound on the inhalation. Some people find it useful to imagine the mirror moved behind the head, and you are trying to fog the mirror behind you as you inhale. It is easier to learn this on the exhalation, so it may feel a bit awkward to you to do this during the inhalation. Practice! Continue to practice Ujjayi breathing during the inhalation and exhalation, allowing your breaths to become smoother, slower, and more refined.

What is happening? The breath is lengthened, and the glottis contracts, drawing the air through a smaller opening. This increases internal pressure, and draws the air more deeply into the lungs, and also opens the alveoli, small sacs lining the lungs which take oxygen from the air and draw it into the blood stream, while removing waste gases such as carbon dioxide from the blood and passing them into the lungs and out of the body during the exhalation. The increase in internal pressure also stimulates the suction of venous blood. The slow, smooth, steady pace of the breath relaxes and calms, and the focus on the sound of the breath quiets the mind.

Why do it? Ujjayi pranayama deeply relaxes the body and calms the mind. The breath is lengthened and the air is drawn to the bottom of the lungs. Concentration increases by using the sound of the breath as the focal point. The mind becomes absorbed and focused by the sound, which induces a calm, even, balanced state of mind. The partial closure of the throat allows you to regulate the flow of breath, enabling you to prolong the inhalation and exhalation, thus gaining more control over the breath. It heightens awareness and enhances creativity. By contracting the glottis, the same amount of air passes through a smaller opening, which increases the amount of internal pressure. This stimulates circulation, metabolism, and the suction of venous blood. It opens the alveoli in the lungs, allowing more complete absorption of Oxygen.

Nadi Shodhana - (pronounced NAH-dee SHOW-dhah-nah) the "Sweet Breath", "Sukha Pranayama" (Sukha translates as comfortable or happy), "Channel Purification Breath" or "Alternate Nostril Breath"- brings balance to the right and left hemispheres of the brain

How to learn it: First come to a comfortable seated position, with your back straight, spine long, and nostrils clear (it is useful to blow your nose before beginning this technique). Traditionally, the RIGHT hand is brought to Vishnu Mudra (the left hand was historically used for "other things" in India, while the right hand was for eating and spiritual work). To create Vishnu Mudra, take your index and middle fingers of your right hand, and bend them down forward across the palm towards the base of the thumb. Hold them there. Keep your ring finger and pinky together (some people find it useful to cross the ring and pinky fingers). (If you are unable to do Vishnu Mudra, just use your right thumb and right ring finger for the following).

Place your right thumb on the right side of your nose, in the small groove where the nostril flares out. GENTLY press the right nostril closed with the right thumb. Gently exhale through the left nostril. Inhale through the left nostril. Close the left nostril with your right ring finger, release your thumb, and exhale through the right nostril. Inhale through the right nostril. Close the right nostril with the thumb, exhale left nostril. this is one round of Nadi Shodhana. Continue with this rhythmic breathing, slowly and smoothly, inhaling fully, exhaling completely. The pattern is "exhale. inhale. switch. exhale. inhale. switch."

To prepare for other breathing techniques: As you become more comfortable with this technique, practice a few holdings. After an inhalation, pinch both nostrils closed and hold the full breath in the body for a moment. then exhale completely. After an exhalation, hold the breath OUT of the body for a moment, noticing this quiet space between breaths. Some beliefs hold that the wisdom of the universe is contained in this quiet dark space between breaths. Do not strive of effort in the holdings - just allow them to occur naturally. The holdings of the breath are not part of Nadi Shodhana - they are simply to prepare you to learn Analoma Veloma, another breathing technique.

NOTE: If you experience dizziness, allow your breath to return to its own natural pattern, and when you try Nadi Shodhana again, SLOW DOWN the breath. If you are gasping, speed up the breath.

NOTES: This breath is relaxed, deep, and full - no straining. The breath may be uneven at first, but will soon settle into a natural rhythm for you. As you begin this technique, don't count or control the breath.

Use no mantras or efforts. Let go, into the tide of the breath, and just relax and be content.

Why do it? AND What is happening? We do not breath equally through both nostrils, and every 2-3 hours alternate nostrils will become the "dominant" breather. Several studies (utilizing EEG technology) have shown that inhaling through the right nostril stimulates the left hemisphere of your brain (associated with verbal skills and creativity). Inhaling through the left nostril stimulates the right hemisphere (associated with logic and spatial performance). There are many nerve endings in the sinus area, and the back of the nasal cavity is close to several major nerve clusters, which may account for this effect on the body. Alternating breathing between the nostrils brings both hemispheres of the brain into balance (similar but more pronounced effects are shown from a regular practice of meditation). This stimulates and synchronizes the hemispheres of the brain, balancing any dominance of one hemisphere or another. This regulates the nervous system, and is a beautiful breath to practice - offering quiet, sweet gifts to the body. It is called "the sweet breath" for a reason - try it and you will see why!

This breath creates whole brain functioning by integrating and balancing the hemispheres of the brain. This balance creates a sense of well-being and contentment. This balances us and elevates us on physical, emotional, and mental levels. People often report feeling more centered, grounded, stable and calm after practicing Nadi Shodhana. Nadi Shodhana also helps alleviate headaches, migraines, anxiety, boredom, and fatigue. Good breath for Pitta personalities!



If you have any questions about yoga or pranayama, please feel free to contact us: NOSPAMelena@focalpointyoga.com
(remove the words NO SPAM from the email address please!)