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The 5 Ashtanga Pranayamas and their benefits

There are 5 pranayamas that Pattabhi Jois researched and put together to go with the Ashtanga practice. Just like the ashtanga practice they are quite intense pranayamas . . . and you learn them just like you learn a series, one pranayama at a time slowly adding on.

All the pranayamas promote cellular health, purifying our blood and nourishing our body with O2 while efficiently expelling CO2. They also reduce stress in our body and mind, inducing tranquility.

When you are ready to learn pranayama, I teach it to you as I learned it, one on one with my teacher after practice. You take your rest after asana practice, then sit up and do your pranayama.

NO Pranayama when SICK or menstruating. Pranayama is **not** for people with:

- ॐ Heart conditions or HBP (if you are on HBP medication you HAVE HBP!)
- ॐ People with LBP also need to avoid pranayama

To begin: If you are doing pranayama after practice no need to do the chant again, however if you are doing it seperately from practice then you want to begin with the opening invocation. Chanting will slow down your breath rate and help you oxygenate your blood preparing you for breath holding.

To End: closing chant

Once you begin pranayama **do it every day for 30 days** (not during menstruation)

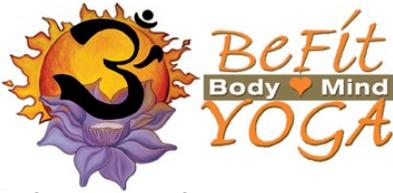
The first two pranayamas seem to be to get you used to holding your breath out and holding your breath in. Breath retention is easier after the second round or cycle. When you hold your breath it stimulates your spleen to contract -- expelling large quantities of red blood cells (and therefore O2) into your bloodstream. Remember it is not the amount of O2 in your lungs that helps you hold your breath -- it is the amount of O2 in your bloodstream that allows you to hold your breath easier, thus after one or two rounds of breath holding it gets easier. (The spleen is an amazing organ -- it is the purifier of our blood and stores a lot of blood, it is connected to our lymph system and is a key organ in removing toxins and microbes from our system. When our body is under duress -- such as hemorrhaging or not breathing -- our spleen contracts and sends extra O2 into our bloodstream to help oxygenate the cells during the "emergency".)

The last three pranayamas are where the "real work" is done.

The first two Pranayamas

In the first pranayama you hold your breath out, you hold your breath in. Of the first two pranayamas I could only find information on the very first three kumbhakas -- the exhale holds = BAAHYA KUMBHAKA.

- ॐ stomach and uterus
- ॐ reduces hernias
- ॐ reduces urinary problems



On the second pranayama you take a breath and hold it in, you release that breath and hold it out. So you are getting used to kumbhaka after each half breath.

Benefits:

- ॐ Purifies our nadis
- ॐ awakens kundalini

Nadi Shodhana is the third pranayama and the hardest of them all. Nadi Shodhana means nerve cleansing, it is an alternate nostril breath with kumbhaka after each half breath. The alternate nostril breathing is best creating balance in our body and mind -- **BALANCING THE ENERGIES IN OUR BODY.**

Recommended for those engaged in metal work.

Benefits:

- ॐ Creates balance in the body and mind by balancing vata, pitta, kapha, and Ida and Pingala.
- ॐ It stimulates your brain to work clearer and induces tranquility.
- ॐ It clears blockages in the nadis (this includes the arteries, the yogic texts claim nadi shodhana can help remove heart blockages).
- ॐ Reduces neural related diseases, migraines, and depression
- ॐ Is good for reducing asthma, allergies and sinus problems



Bhastrika is the 4th (and my fav) pranayama. Bhastrika means bellows and just like how a bellows fans a flame to make it stronger bhastrika increases our agni -- our digestive fire in our solar plexus area.

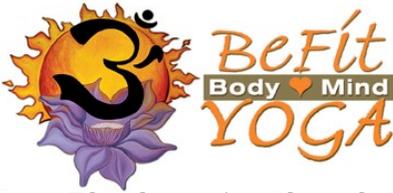
The “work” in this pranayama is the breathing, the kumbhaka is only to bring your CO2 levels back to normal after performing bhastrika.

- ॐ Pulmonary ventilation as in bhastrika causes a massive excretion of CO2 into our blood stream, and must be followed by breath retention to bring CO2 levels in our blood back to normal. Short holds are all that is needed – It is not necessary to increase hold time on these holds (also true for Kapalabhati).

Breathing in this manner pulls the air across our ol’ factory sense where we absorb more prana from the atmosphere. This breath also clears the mind.

Other benefits include:

- ॐ Increases Agni and improves digestion
- ॐ Burns up toxins
- ॐ Removes phlegm (improving kapha), improves bile (regulating pitta), and regulates wind (curing vata problems).
- ॐ Improves metabolism
- ॐ Reduces the level of CO2 in the lungs.
- ॐ Good for asthmatics



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Surya Bhedana (& Chandra Bhedana)

This pranayama is where you get to practice longer holds increasing prana absorption, digestion of air, and improving cellular health. This is also an alternate nostril pranayama.

Do not “time” yourself, this western propensity leads to “performance” which is opposed to the spirit of yoga and not in your best interest. Instead just count your heartbeats in multiples of 8 and hold your breath to a comfortable level.

Benefits:

- ॐ Creates heat in the body – Surya Bhedana, Chandra Bhedana cools the body.
- ॐ Balances vata dosha
- ॐ Activates Pingali increasing extroversion (Chandra Bhedana activates Ida inducing introversion)
- ॐ Energizes the body and reduces laziness
- ॐ Chandra Bhedana cools the body and helps cure heart burn.

Finishing Pranayama: **Sitali**

Sitali is like closing -- no matter where you stop your pranayama you always end with Sitali. SITALI IS COOLING, as stated earlier pranayama increases your body heat, so you end with sitali to cool your blood so as not get a fever or overheated. The kumbhaka here is short, as breath holding builds your body heat you do not want to hold too long.

Benefits:

- ॐ Cools the body and mind
- ॐ Improves temperature regulation through the brain centers
- ॐ cools and reduces mental and emotional excitation
- ॐ Induces relaxation

PULSE OXIMETER – I ordered one for the studio for us to play with, a pulse oximeter is a finger clip with a beam in it that can measure the amount of O₂ in your blood. It might be fun to check our blood O₂ level before a practice and after a practice :)

Many Paths – OTHER WAYS TO INCREASE YOUR PRANA

Main points of prana absorption in order of importance

1. Nerve endings in the nasal cavities
 - ॐ The olfactory sense is where our nose collects prana from the atmosphere, this is why nasal breathing all day (not just on your yoga mat!) is important.
2. Air cells in the lungs
 - ॐ We absorb prana in our nose and lungs from the atmosphere -- sun, wind, and large masses of moving water are the areas that have the most prana (negative ions). Air conditioned air and inside air has not prana in it.
 - ॐ this is where pranayama and slow breathing gives our body more time to absorb the prana from the air we breathed in, better digesting our inhaled air.



3. Tongue

- ॐ The tongue is actually an important part of prana absorption, a considerable part of our energy is extracted from food — how well this energy fuels us and fills our body with vitality depends on the pranic quality of the food. The yogis link prana with taste, so food that has real flavor has more prana -- flavor is not prana, it only indicates its presence.
- ॐ Flavor indicates prana, Foods with the most prana are fresh vegetables and fruits that are not too long out of the earth and sunshine (more on this in November 2011 topic Prana: <http://www.befityoga.com/2011/11/november-2011-prana/> Foods that are processed and/or chemically flavored contain very little to NO prana. Prana in foods is associated with giving us better vitality.
 - o Ever hear of light in food? There really is light in fresh foods! Biophotons are little particles of sunlight in food that the plant collects from the sun. Biophotons give us vitality. The longer a plant is out of the sun the more the biophotons fade.

4. Skin

- ॐ We absorb prana from the atmosphere through our skin. We need our skin to be exposed to sun, wind, and water with very little clothes on. This is why we must not electrically insulate our bodies; clothes and shoes interfere with our electrical exchanges through the atmosphere. Some materials are better than others, for example cotton, silk, and wool do not interfere with our prana absorption vs. polyester which totally blocks the skin exchanges (thats why I am a 100% cotton girl!). Wearing polyester is like wearing plastic soda bottles on your skin. The manufacturers will tell you that the fake materials “wick” . . . but cotton dries pretty fast . . . and those “wicking” materials do not let your skin breathe. They suffocate. Walking barefoot on Mother Earth – Rubber soled shoes also interfere with our prana absorption -- walking bare feet on mother earth serves us well in several ways -- absorbing prana and also the electrical exchange that takes place between our bodies and the earth.
- ॐ charging and dis-charging. We are like little conductors walking around -- we absorb energy from the earth through our feet. The best conductor are moist dirt (not grass) and wet sand.

We use nature to ‘charge our batteries’; through our lungs and skin we are constantly charging and discharging – the purer the air and the less clothes and shoes we have to interfere the better. This constant charging and discharging is what fills us with vitality — with prana.

clothing – natural materials like cotton and silk allow for prana absorption. Polyester and man made fabric block the absorption of prana through the skin.



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Rest Pose breathing exercise to help you connect with your breath:

- ॐ Observe your natural and spontaneous breathing process
- ॐ Develop awareness of the rhythmic flow of your breath
- ॐ Feel your breath flowing in and out of your nose
- ॐ Notice your breath is cool as it enters your nose and warm as it leaves
- ॐ Bring your awareness to the region of your throat
- ॐ Feel your breath flowing in and out of the back of your throat
- ॐ Bring your awareness to the region of your chest
- ॐ Feel your breath flowing in the trachea and bronchial tubes
- ॐ Feel your breath flowing into your lungs
- ॐ Be aware of your lungs expanding and pressing into your rib cage, then relaxing
- ॐ Shift your attention to your rib cage and enjoy the expansion and relaxation of this area
- ॐ Bring your awareness down to your abdomen
- ॐ Feel your abdomen expand on the inhale and fall in on the exhale
- ॐ Feel the entire breathing process from your nostrils to your abdomen
- ॐ Feel your body absorb prana and energy from the inhaled air
- ॐ Feel your body expel toxins from your body and mind as you exhale
- ॐ Return to this state often.



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 STARTED 9/22/09

Pranayama

Rechaka (exhale)
 Kumbhaka (hold)
 Puraka (inhale)

Sit in Lotus

take 5 breaths

(Rechaka) exhale (Kumbhaka) hold 12 (Puraka) inhale
 (Rechaka) exhale (Kumbhaka) hold 12 (Puraka) inhale
 (Rechaka) exhale (Kumbhaka) hold 12 (Puraka) inhale

16 / 24

(Puraka) inhale (Kumbhaka) hold 18 (Rechaka) exhale
 (Puraka) inhale (Kumbhaka) hold 18 (Rechaka) exhale
 (Puraka) inhale (Kumbhaka) hold 18 (Rechaka) exhale

take 5 breaths

(Puraka) inhale (Kumbhaka) hold for 15 (Rechaka) exhale (Kumbhaka) hold for 12
 (Puraka) inhale (Kumbhaka) hold for 15 (Rechaka) exhale (Kumbhaka) hold for 12
 (Puraka) inhale (Kumbhaka) hold for 15 (Rechaka) exhale (Kumbhaka) hold for 12

16/20
~~21/20~~
~~20/24~~

take five breaths

- | | | | | |
|----------------------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| • in both | 9. in R | Hold 12 ct | 20. out L | Hold 12 ct |
| • out both | 10. out L | | 21. in L | |
| | 11. in R | | 22. out L | |
| 1. in R (hold) 12 ct | 12. out R | | 23. in L | |
| 2. out L | 13. in R | | 24. out L | |
| 3. in L | 14. out R | | 25. in L | |
| 4. out R | 15. in R | | 26. out R | |
| 5. in R | 16. out R | | | |
| 6. out L | 17. in R | | • in R | |
| 7. in L | 18. out L | | • out L | |
| 8. out R | 19. in L | | | |

AFTER 4th
 INHA. TO 18 CT
 IF COMFORTABLE

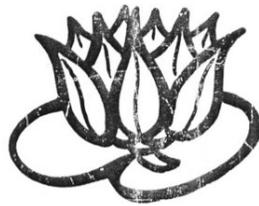
TAKE 5 BREATHS
 → SITALI 3x HOLD 10 CT (PURAKA KUMBHAKA)



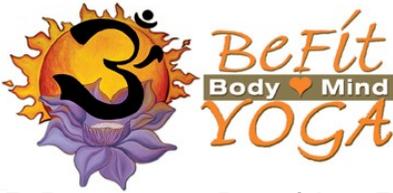
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CLOSING PRAYER

*Let us live together, let us eat together,
let us do heroic deeds together,
let the bright ones study together, let us be loving*



*Sahana Vavatu Sahanoḥ Bunaktu Sahaviryam
Kahava Vahaye Tejas Vinoh
Adhidamastu Mavid Visha Vahaii
Om Shanti Shanti Shanti*



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PRE-Pranayama Breathing Exercises

THE FOUR PURIFICATIONS

These breathing exercises I learned from Nancy, she learned them from her other “guru”, Baba Hari Dass. They are known as “The Four Purifications” and help to prepare one for pranayama; they are generally safe for everyone but best when accompanied by a consistent yoga practice, and best done after your asana practice. They are 2 breathing exercises and 2 bandha exercises. I will teach them after practices this week. After rest pose we will sit up and do:

Nadi Shodhana

Alternate nostril breathing (without khumbaka). To alternate the nostrils you use a special mudra -- a mudra is a position that elicits energy movement in your body. The mudra for Nadi Shodhana breathing exercises is called Vishnu Mudra -- it makes the closing and opening of nostrils smooth and efficient.

Vishnu Mudra (hand gesture of Lord Vishnu) This is one of the hand gestures used to alternate the breath through the nostrils during Shodana. In this mudra the right hand is used as it is associated with giving while the left is associated with receiving. However if for whatever reason you need to use your left hand during practice that is fine. The thumb and fingers rest lightly so very little movement is needed to close each side during practice.



Nadi
is

Vishnu is the Hindu God who preserves the universe. He does this through an interplay of opposites; creation and destruction, male and female, dark and light. Uniting these qualities through yogic practices helps us keep a balance in our lives and live with more understanding of others and how we relate to them.

Alternate nostril breathing is about bringing balance in our body and mind -- balance in being extroverted and introverted, balance between our feminine and masculine sides. The mudra used for this is appropriately named after the god responsible for helping us with this balance.

Nadi Shodhana in the four purifications – you place your right hand in Vishnu Mudra position on either side of your nostrils, your breath should be deep and slow; Inhale Left (closing the right nostril with your thumb), exhale Right (closing the the left nostril with your ring finger), Inhale Right, Exhale Left = L R R L. This is one round. Start by performing 10 rounds and gradually increase to as many as 40 rounds.

You can use your left hand for counting, at the start of each round use a finger to keep track of how many you have done.



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Kapalabhati

Means Skull Shining. it is a breath that is similar to Bhastrika but a bit easier. You pump your lungs on the exhale and relax on the inhale (in bhastrika you pump both on the inhale and exhale). Do 30 blasts, then take a few recovery breaths and repeat for a total of three rounds. You can gradually increase to 60 blasts for 10 rounds.

Kapalabhati helps to clear your mind and calm your thoughts, reducing stress.

Working with the bandhas in the last 2 purifications

This first exercise should not be done during menstruation, if you think you are pregnant or if you are trying to become pregnant.

Agnisara Dhauti (Agni = Fire, Sara = Cascade, Dhauti = Purification)

Take a deep inhale, then exhale all air out and hold. If this is new to you, do this a couple times to get used to holding your breath out. Once you are comfortable holding your breath out, exhale hold -- lean forward place your hands on your knees -- lift and drop your abdomen as many times as you can while comfortably holding your breath out. Work up to 30 pulls for three rounds. Over time you can increase it to 60 pulls.

Agnisara Dhauti strengthens your uddiyana bandha, purifies your 3rd chakra, stimulates our digestive fire, and eliminates constipation.

Ashvini Mudra

Ashvini means horse, the posture is named after a horse since the horse does this gesture after going to the bathroom.

Inhale completely and hold your breath in, contract and release the anal sphincter rapidly and repeatedly, only as long as you can comfortably hold your breath. Work up 30 pulls for 3 rounds, increase gradually to 60 pulls when 30 is easy.

Ashvini mudra strengthens the pelvic floor, improves mula bandha and pushes prana upward slowing down the aging process. This mudra can also be used to heal problems such as hemorrhoids and constipation.

Putting them all together:

After practicing all 4 purifications for 3-6 months you can put them together and practice them in a way that there are no "rest breaths" in between. For example:

ॐ Do 10 rounds Nadi Shodhana, after last exhale out Left nostril

ॐ Inhale partially through both nostrils and begin kapalabhati. After 1 series inhale completely, exhale fully and HOLD your breath out

ॐ do Agnisara Dhauti for 30 - 60 pulls, inhale completely and HOLD your breath in



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ॐ do Ashvini Mudra for 30–60 pulls. Exhale completely and begin again with Nadi Shodhana. Do a total of 5 rounds in this way.

I performed these four purifications as part of my meditation practice for years before I learned the Pranayamas from Nancy. I enjoyed doing them and miss them now that I do pranayama instead. It was fun to do them again this month.

The four purifications practice prepares you well for pranayama, improves your connection to your bandhas, and improves your breathing.

ONE MINUTE MEDITATION

Lastly I want to share with you a ONE MINUTE BREATHING/MEDITATION that I learned from a Western Ayurvedic Dr. name John Douillard who is in CO. He recommends this meditation: “It pumps oxygen into your brain so your brain begins to feel from the heart rather than think from the mind. Let your heart be in the driver’s seat for a minute versus the controlling interests and needs of your mind. Often times this pumps enough energy into your nervous system to give you the ability to be calmer and settle your mind.”

<http://lifesp.com/2009/08/one-minute-meditation/>

It is a simple breathing exercise that can be done anywhere, anytime. It is especially good to use if you are getting ready to face a stressful situation or need to clear your mind or calm your nervous system.

- ॐ Begin with Bhastrika (bellows breath): Breathe deep through your nose, in and out, using all five lobes of your lungs like a big bellows. Use your lungs in and out as much as you can -- in and out only through your nose. Do that for 30 blasts.
- ॐ Then do our normal yogic loud breathing (some call it Ujjai) slowly (about a 5 second inhale and a 5 second exhale) for 5–10 breaths. Repeat if you have time (you can lengthen the time of ujjai breathing if you have more time or if you plan to do several rounds of this).

When we use all of our lungs, especially our lower lungs, like in bhastrika, we activate calm receptors that soothe our nervous system.



"The world is an abstract art. We see it as we want to see it. It is a garden of roses and it is also a forest of thorny bushes and poison oak."

*** INTERMEDIATE METHOD**

AFTER PRACTICING THE 4 PUBLICATIONS SEPARATELY FOR 3-6 MOS, YOU CAN PRACTICE THEM IN A WAY THERE ARE NO 'REST BREATHS' IN BETWEEN. FOR EXAMPLE:

- DO 10 ROUNDS OF NADISHODHANA
- AFTER LAST EXHALATION OUT (L) NOSTRIL
- INHALE PARTIALLY THROUGH BOTH NOSTRILS + IMMEDIATELY BEGIN KAPALA BHATI
- AFTER 1 SERIES INHALE COMPLETELY, EXHALE FULLY
- HOLD THE BREATH OUT + DO
- ~~AS~~ AGNISARA DHAUTI
- AFTER 1 ROUND INHALE COMPLETELY. HOLD THE BREATH IN
- + DO ASHVINI MUDRA
- EXHALE COMPLETELY OUT THE NOSTRILS + BEGIN AGAIN W/ NADI SHODHANA.
- DO 5 ROUNDS

These four techniques must be practiced for two to three months before beginning regular *pranayama*. Do them in the order given. Sit in a meditation posture with eyes closed, concentrating on *ajna chakra*.

Nadishodhana

(Alternate Nostril Breathing)

Gently exhale all air. Close the right nostril with the thumb of the right hand, and inhale slowly and deeply through the left nostril. Close the left nostril with the ring finger, releasing the thumb, and exhale through the right. Inhale through the right, then close it with the thumb and exhale through the left. This makes one round. Begin with ten rounds and gradually increase to forty.

Kapala Bhati

(Skull Shining)

Kapala bhati is a series of forced exhalations: exhale and inhale quickly and lightly through both nostrils, feeling energy striking the point behind the eyebrow center. Emphasize the exhale, letting the inhalation come as a natural reflex. After one series of exhalations, which should last no longer than one minute, rest and breathe naturally. Then repeat. Begin with three rounds of thirty exhalations each and increase gradually to ten rounds of sixty each.

This method purifies the head area which calms the thoughts. In this way

the rapid breathing of *kapala bhati* induces a calm mind and calm breath. Persons with high blood pressure or lung disease should not practice *kapala bhati*. *Kapala bhati* is also one of the *Shat Karma*. (See page 19.)

Agnisara Dhauti

(Fire Wash)

Inhale, then exhale all air. While holding the breath out, pull the abdomen up and toward the backbone; release it suddenly. Repeat this in-and-out movement rapidly as long as the breath can be held out without strain. Then inhale gently. Start with three rounds and increase gradually to ten, beginning with thirty pulls and increasing to sixty in each breath.

This method strengthens *uddiyana bandha* and creates heat at the navel center (*manipura chakra*), which purifies the *nadis* and stimulates the digestive system.

Ashvini Mudra

(Horse Mudra)

Inhale completely and hold the breath. Contract and release the anal sphincter rapidly and repeatedly. Hold the breath only so long as the following exhalation can be slow and controlled. Begin with three rounds of thirty pulls each, and increase gradually to ten rounds of sixty each.

Ashvini mudra strengthens *mula bandha* and pushes *prana* upward.

* SEE NOTE