

Pranayama practice: how to do it and its benefits

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Abstract

Pranayama is the ancient practice of controlling the breath. Every breath and hold are controlled in terms of timing, duration, and frequency. The primary aim of pranayama is to connect the body and mind. It also provides oxygen to the body while eliminating toxins. This is intended to provide physiological healing benefits. This article outlines the comprehensive review of pranayama practice and its benefits.

Keywords: Pranayama, Pranayama procedure, Pranayama practice, Benefits

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I. Introduction

Pranayama is referred to as breath control. 'Prana' and 'Ayama' are the two roots that make up the word pranayama. Prana is a Sanskrit term that means "life force" or "vital energy." It is the force that permeates all things, whether they are living or inanimate. It is more subdued than air or oxygen, despite being closely related to the air we breathe. In order to affect the flow of prana in the nadis, or energy channels, of the pranayama kosha, or energy body, pranayama makes use of breathing (Sarawathi, 2002). In order to transcend one's typical limits or constraints and reach a higher state of vibratory energy, one can activate and regulate their life force using pranayama techniques. Breathing techniques and exercises are a part of pranayama. You deliberately follow a certain order of inhaling, exhaling, and holding your breath.

Definition

Pranayama is a system of techniques used to harness and manipulate universal energy known as *prana*. It is an integral aspect of yoga, often incorporated into asana practice or used as a preliminary step for meditation (Yogapedia, 2020).

Components of Pranayama

The four main aspects of breathing that are used in pranayama exercises are as follows. They are:

1. Pooraka or inhalation
2. Rechaka or exhalation
3. Antarkunbhaka or internal breath retention
4. Bahir kumbhaka or external breath retention.

Certainly, the retention of the breath, or kumbhaka, is the most significant aspect of pranayama. But for kumbhaka to be successfully performed, control over the respiration process needs to be gradually developed. As a result, in the beginning of the pranayama practices, more emphasis is placed on inhalation and exhalation in order to strengthen the lungs and balance the nervous and pranic systems in order to prepare for the practice of kumbhaka.

Advantages of Pranayama:

i. Prana and Livelihood

The pranamaya kosha and its pranas are significantly impacted by lifestyle. Exercise, work, sleep, food consumption, and sexual relations are all physical activities that have an impact on how prana is distributed and moves through the body. Even more so are mental attributes like emotion, thought, and imagination that have an impact on the pranic body. Stress, poor eating habits, and lifestyle irregularities all deplete and obstruct pranic flow. People consequently report feeling "drained of energy." The pranayama techniques transform this process around, energizing and balancing the various pranas within the pranamaya kosha.

ii. Pranayama, breathing, and healthy life

The most crucial physiological function is breathing. About 21,600 breaths are taken by an adult human each day, or 15 breaths per minute. Each muscular contraction, glandular secretion, and thought process are all powered by the oxygen and glucose that are burned during respiration. The brain's rhythms are distraught by irregular breathing, which causes physical, emotional, and mental blockages. Internal conflict, an unbalanced personality, an unhealthy lifestyle, and disease are the results of these. Regular breathing patterns are established by pranayama, which disrupts the cycle and turns the process around (Jayadeva Togendra, 2017).

iii. Life span and breathing

The rhythm of breathing controls both the length and quantity of life in addition to affecting its quality. The yogis and rishis of old studied nature in depth. They discovered that while animals with a fast-breathing rate, like birds, dogs, and rabbits, only live a few years, slower breathing animals, like pythons, elephants, and tortoises, have longer life spans. They understood the significance of slow breathing for extending human life as a result of their observation. A slower breathing rate keeps the heart healthier and stronger, which prolongs life (Sarawathi, 2002). Additionally, deep breathing increases the pranayama kosha's capacity to absorb energy, which improves dynamism, vitality, and overall wellbeing.

iv. Decrease Stress

Pranayama is useful for reducing stress and improving cardiovascular function. (Sharma, 2013) found in healthy young adults, pranayama reduced perceived stress levels. The researchers hypothesized that pranayama calms the nervous system, improving stress response. Pranayama promotes increased oxygen uptake. Oxygen provides energy to vital organs like the brain and nerves.

v. Improves sleep quality

The stress-relieving effects of pranayama may also aid in sleep. For example, when practiced for 5 minutes, Bhramari pranayama was shown to slow breathing and heart rate. This may aid in the relaxation of your body in preparation for sleep. According to (amrit kaur, 2019) found that pranayama improves sleep quality in people with obstructive sleep apnea. Furthermore, practicing pranayama reduced snoring and daytime sleepiness, implying benefits for better quality sleep.

Notes for the practitioner

In the traditional texts, there are innumerable rules and regulations pertaining to pranayama. The main points are to exercise moderation, balance, and common sense with regard to inner and outer thinking and living. However, for those who seriously wish to take up the advanced practices of pranayama, the guidance of a guru or experienced teacher is essential.

Breathing:

Always breathe through the nose and not the mouth unless specifically instructed otherwise. The nose should be cleaned regularly by *jalaneti* prior to the practice session. Be aware of the nostrils throughout the techniques. While inhaling, the nostrils should dilate or expand outwards and while exhaling, they should relax back to their normal position.

Time of practice:

The best time to practice pranayama is during the early morning when the body is fresh, and the mind has very few impressions. If this is not possible, another good time is just after sunset. Tranquillising pranayama may be performed before sleep. Try to practice regularly at the same time and place each day. Regularity in practice increases strength and willpower as well as acclimatizing the body and mind to the increased pranic force. Do not be in a hurry; slow, steady progress is essential.

Place of practice:

Practice in a quiet, clean, and pleasant room which is well ventilated but not draughty. Generally, avoid practicing in direct sunlight, as the body will become over-heated, except at dawn when the soft rays of the early morning sun are beneficial. Practicing in a draught or wind, in air-conditioning or under a fan may upset the body temperature and cause chills.

Sitting position:

A comfortable, sustainable meditation posture is necessary to enable efficient breathing and body steadiness during the practice. Siddha/siddha yoni asana is one of the best postures for pranayama. The body should be as relaxed as possible throughout the practice with the spine, neck and head erect. Sit on a folded blanket or cloth of natural fiber to ensure the maximum conduction of energy during the practice.

Sequence:

Pranayama should be performed after asanas and before meditation practice. After practicing pranayama, one may lie down in shavasana for a few minutes.

Clothes:

Loose, comfortable clothing made of natural fibres should be worn during the practice. The body may be covered with a sheet or blanket when it is cold or to keep insects away.

Bathing:

Take a bath or shower before commencing the practice, or at least wash the hands, face and feet. Do not take a bath for at least half an hour after the practice to allow the body temperature to normalize.

Empty stomach:

Wait at least three to four hours after meals before starting pranayama. Food in the stomach places pressure on the diaphragm and lungs, making full, deep respiration difficult.

Digestion:

When commencing pranayama practice, constipation, and a reduction in the quantity of urine may be experienced. In the case of dry motion, stop taking salt and spices, and drink plenty of water. In the case of loose motion, stop the practices for a few days and go on a diet of rice and curd or yoghurt.

Diet:

A balanced diet of protein, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, and minerals is suitable for most pranayama practices. A combination of grains, pulses, fresh fruit, and vegetables, with a little milk product if necessary, is recommended. The more advanced stages of pranayama require a change in diet and a guru should be consulted for guidance on this.

Avoid strain:

With all pranayama practices it is important to remember that the instruction not to strain, not to try to increase your capacity too fast, applies just as it does to asana practice. If one is advised to practice a pranayama technique for a specific length of time, before moving on to a more advanced practice or ratio, it is wise to follow that instruction. Furthermore, breath retention should only be practiced for as long as is comfortable. The lungs are very delicate organs, and any misuse can easily cause them injury. Not only the physical body but also the mental and emotional aspects of the personality need time to adjust. Never strain in any way.

Side effects:

When practicing for the first time, various symptoms may manifest in normally healthy people. These are caused by the process of purification and the expulsion of toxins. Sensations of itching, tingling, heat or cold and feelings of lightness or heaviness may occur. Such experiences are generally temporary but if they persist during the practice, check with a yoga teacher.

Contra-indications:

Pranayama should not be practiced during illness, although simple techniques such as breath awareness and abdominal breathing in shavasana may be performed. Always consult a yoga therapist or teacher before using any pranayama for therapeutic purposes.

No smoking: It is not advisable for pranayama practitioners to smoke tobacco or cannabis.

NADI SHODHANA PRANAYAMA

NadiShodhana, also known as Alternate Nostril Breathing, is a powerful breathing practice with wide-reaching benefits.



Hand position: Nasagra Mudra (nosetip position)

- Hold the fingers of the right hand in front of the face. Rest the index and middle fingers gently on the eyebrow centre. Both fingers should be relaxed.
- The thumb is above the right nostril and the ring finger above the left. These two digits control the flow of breath in the nostrils by alternately pressing on one nostril, blocking the flow of breath, and then the other.
- The little finger is comfortably folded. When practicing for long periods, the elbow may be supported in the palm of the left hand, although care is needed to prevent chest restriction.

NadiShodhana Pranayama (psychic network purification).

Technique I: Preparatory practice for NadiShodhana Pranayama

- Sit comfortably in any meditation posture, preferably siddha/siddha yoni asana or padmasana. (Those who are unable to sit in a meditation posture may sit with their legs outstretched against a wall or in a chair with a straight back.)

- Maintain a straight spine and head.
- Close your eyes and relax your entire body.
- Spend some time practicing yogic breathing.
- Adopt nasagra mudra with the right hand and chin or jnana mudra with the left hand.
- With your thumb, close the right nostril.
- 5 times, inhale, and exhale through the left nostril.
- The inhalation/exhalation rate should be normal.
- Be mindful of each breath.
- After 5 breaths, release the pressure on the right nostril with the thumb and block the flow of air with the ring finger.
- Inhale and exhale 5 times through the right nostril, maintaining a normal respiratory rate.
- Lower your hand and take 5 deep breaths through both nostrils.
- This is the first round. 5 rounds or 3 to 5 minutes of practice, making sure there is no sound as the air passes through the nostrils.
- After 15 days of practice, move on to technique 2.

Technique 2: Alternate nostril breathing

- The duration of inhalation/exhalation is controlled in this technique.
- With your thumb, close the right nostril and breathe in through the left.
- At the same time, mentally count, "1, 2, 3" until the inhalation is complete. This is the fundamental count.
- Breathe deeply using yogic breathing techniques. Make no effort.
- Close the left nostril with the ring finger, release the pressure on the right nostril with the thumb, and count to ten while breathing out through the right nostril "1,2,3". Inhalation and exhalation times should be equal.
- Next, inhale through the right nostril while maintaining the same count.
- Close the right nostril at the end of inhalation, open the left nostril, and exhale through the left nostril, counting as before.
- This is the first round. At the end of the inhalation, close the right nostril, open the left nostril, and exhale through the left nostril, counting as before.
- This is the only round.
- Perform ten rounds of practice.

Technique 3: Using AntarKumbhaka (inner retention)

- Close the right nostril and take 5 slow breaths in through the left nostril.
- Close both nostrils and hold the air in the lungs for a count of 5 after inhaling.
- To keep the air in the lungs, the glottis may be slightly contracted.
- Open the right nostril, breathe in slightly through it, and then slowly exhale through the same nostril for 5 counts.
- The exhalation should be as smooth and controlled as the inhalation.
- After exhaling, immediately inhale through the right nostril for a count of 5, keeping the left nostril closed.
- Hold your breath for a count of 5 while closing both nostrils.
- Breathe in slightly through the left nostril, then out through the same nostril for a count of five.
- This is the single round. Maintain constant awareness of the count and the breath. Perform ten rounds of practice.

Technique 4: with Antar and Bahir Kumbhaka (internal and external retention)

- Take a deep breath in through the left nostril.
- In antarkumbhaka, keep the breath inside as described in technique 3. Exhale through the right nostril.
- After exhaling, close both nostrils and hold the breath out for the desired count.
- To keep the air out of the lungs, the glottis may be slightly contracted.
- Before inhaling, exhale slightly through your right nostril.
- Slowly inhale through your right nostril.
- In antarkumbhaka, keep your breath inside.
- Exhale out of your left nostril.
- Hold the breath out to the count in bahirkumbhaka with both nostrils closed.

- This is only the first round. At the start of the next round, remember to exhale slightly through the right nostril before inhaling. Perform 5 rounds of practice.

Duration:

5 to 10 rounds, or 10 to 15 minutes per day.

Benefits:

- Nadishodhana ensures that the entire body is nourished by an extra supply of oxygen.
- Carbon dioxide is efficiently expelled, and the blood is cleansed of toxins.
- The brain centers are stimulated to work at their peak performance.
- It also promotes tranquillity, clarity of thought, and concentration, and is recommended for those engaged in mental work.
- It boosts vitality and reduces stress and anxiety by balancing the pranas (Sharma, 2013).
- It removes pranic blockages and balances the ida and pingalanadis, allowing the sushumanadi to flow, leading to deep states of meditation and spiritual awakening.

SHEETALI PRANAYAMA



Sheetali Pranayama (cooling breath)

- Sit in any comfortable meditation posture with your hands on your knees in chin or jnana mudra.
- Close your eyes and relax the entire body.
- Extend the tongue as far outside the mouth as possible without strain.
- Roll the sides of the tongue up to form a tube.
- Inhale and draw your breath in through this tube.
- At the end of the inhalation, draw the tongue in, close the mouth, and exhale through the nose.
- Throughout the practice, use yogic breathing.
- The breath should make a sound similar to rushing wind.
- The tongue and the roof of the mouth will feel icy cold.
- This is the only round. Perform 9 rounds of practice.

Duration:

Increase the number of rounds from 9 to 15, as well as the duration of each inhalation/exhalation, gradually. In most cases, 15 rounds are adequate; however, in extremely hot weather, up to 60 rounds may be performed.

Precaution:

Do not use this technique in a dirty, polluted environment or in cold weather. Before entering the delicate lungs, the nose warms and cleans the inhaled air. Breathing through the mouth, on the other hand, bypasses this air-conditioning, and introducing cold or dirty air directly into the lungs may be harmful.

Contra-indications:

People with low blood pressure or respiratory disorders such as asthma, bronchitis, or excess mucus should avoid this pranayama. Those with heart disease should practice without holding their breath. Because this practice reduces the activity of the lower energy centers, those suffering from chronic constipation should avoid it.

Benefits:

- This practice both cools the body and the mind.
- It has an impact on key brain areas associated with biological drives and temperature regulation. It cools and calms the mind and emotions while also promoting the free flow of prana throughout the body (Shastri, 2017).

- It induces muscular relaxation and mental tranquility, and it can be used as a sedative prior to sleep (Amrit Kaur, 2019).
- It suppresses hunger and thirst while also providing a sense of satisfaction.
- It aids in the reduction of blood pressure and acid reflux.

SEETKARI PRANAYAMA



Seetkari Pranayama (hissing breath)

- Place yourself in a comfortable meditation posture.
- Close your eyes and relax your entire body.
- Hold the teeth together lightly.
- Separate the lips to reveal the teeth.
- In khechari mudra, the tongue can be kept flat or folded against the soft palate (refer to the section Mudra).
- Inhale slowly and deeply through your teeth.
- Close the mouth at the end of the inhalation, keeping the tongue flat or in khechari mudra.
- Breathe out slowly and deliberately through your nose.
- This is the first round. Perform 9 rounds of practice.

Duration:

As for sheetali pranayama.

Contra-indications:

The same as with sheetali pranayama. Sheetali pranayama should be practiced instead by practitioners who have sensitive teeth, missing teeth, or dentures.

Benefits:

Sheetali pranayama has the added benefit of keeping the teeth and gums healthy.

BHRAMARI PRANAYAMA



Bhramari Pranayama (humming bee breath)

- Sit comfortably in a meditation asana. The spinal cord should be straight, the head should be straight, and the hands should be resting on the knees in the chin.
- Place the feet flat on the floor, knees raised, and elbows resting on the knees.
- For a few moments, close your eyes and relax the entire body.
- Throughout the procedure, the lips should be gently closed, and the teeth slightly separated. Make sure the jaw is relaxed.
- Raise the arms sideways, bend the elbows, and bring the hands to the ears. Plug the ears with the index or middle finger. The ear flaps can be pressed without inserting fingers.
- Inhale deeply through the nose. Exhale slowly and steadily while making a deep, steady humming sound similar to that of a black bee.
- For the duration of the exhalation, the humming sound should be smooth, even, and continuous.
- This is the first round. Breathe in deeply and repeat the process at the end of your exhalation. Complete 5 rounds.

Duration:

5 to 10 rounds are sufficient at first, then gradually increase to 10 to 15 minutes. Practice for up to 30 minutes in cases of extreme mental tension or anxiety, or when used to aid the healing process.

Contraindications:

Bhramari should never be done while lying down. People who have severe ear infections should avoid doing this pranayama until the infection has cleared up. Those with heart disease must practice without holding their breath.

Benefits:

Bhramari relieves stress and cerebral tension, as well as anger, anxiety, and insomnia, and lowers blood pressure (amrit kaur, 2019). It hastens the healing of body tissue and can be used after surgery. It strengthens and improves the voice and cures throat problems.

BHASTRIKA PRANAYAMA



Bhastrika Pranayama (bellows breath)

- Sit in any comfortable meditation posture.
- Close the eyes and relax the entire body while maintaining a spine straight.

Left nostril:

- Close the right nostril with the thumb. Breathe in and out forcefully, without straining, through the left nostril 10 times. Count each breath mentally. The abdomen should expand and contract rhythmically with the breath.
- After 10 breaths, breathe in deeply through the left nostril while keeping the right nostril closed.
- Fill the lungs as much as possible, expanding both the chest and abdomen.
- Close both nostrils and keep the breath inside.
- Hold the breath for a few seconds.
- Exhale through the left nostril.

Right nostril:

- Close the left nostril and breathe in and out forcefully 10 times through the right nostril, counting each time.
- Inhale slowly and deeply through the right nostril.
- Close both nostrils and keep the breath inside.

- Hold the breath for a few seconds.
- Exhale slowly through the right nostril.

Both nostrils:

- Open both nostrils. Breathe in and out forcefully through both nostrils 10 times, mentally counting each time.
- Inhale slowly and deeply through both nostrils.
- Close both nostrils and retain the breath for a few seconds. Breathe out slowly through both nostrils together.

Duration:

Perform up to 5 rounds. Slowly increase the duration of retention up to 30 seconds after breathing through the left, the right and both nostrils. Do not strain.

Contra-indications:

Bhastrika should not be practiced by people who suffer from high blood pressure, heart disease, hernia, gastric ulcer, stroke, epilepsy, or vertigo. Those suffering from lung diseases such as asthma and chronic bronchitis, 396 or who are recovering from tuberculosis, are recommended to practice only under expert guidance.

Benefits:

- This practice burns up toxins.
- Bhastrika lessens the level of carbon dioxide in the lungs.
- It is an excellent practice for people with asthma and other lung disorders(Shankarappa V., 2012).
- It helps to reduce throat inflammation and phlegm buildup.
- It balances and strengthens the nervous system, promoting peace, tranquility, and focus on preparation for meditation.

II. Conclusion:

Pranayama is a technique or process for calming the mind. Pranayama could help to achieve a healthy body and mind. One can live a healthy life and lead a path to higher levels of reunification through the process of Prana (vital force). There are some rules that must be followed when doing pranayama. It can be used as a therapeutic procedure in certain cases.

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