

Yoga Breathing (*Pranayama*) – What is Yoga Breathing?

Pranayama means breathing techniques or breath control. In our respiration process, we breathe in or inhale oxygen into our body, going through our body systems in a form of energy to rejuvenate it. Then we exhale carbon dioxide and take away all toxic wastes from our body. Through the practice of Pranayama, the balance of oxygen and carbon dioxide is attained. Absorbing prana through breath control, links our body, mind and spirit.

But, life is full of stress. Because of daily work, family, or financial pressure, we tend to ignore our breathing. It tends to be fast and shallow. The use of only a fraction of your lungs results in lack of oxygen and may lead to different complications. Heart diseases, sleep disorders, and fatigue are some of the effects of oxygen starvation. Therefore, the negative energy of being restless and troublesome lead to lesser prana inside the body. By practicing deep and systematic breathing Pranayama, we reenergize our body.

Benefits of Pranayama

- 1) Proper way to breathe
- 2) Reduces the toxins and wastes from within our body
- 3) Helps in our digestion
- 4) Develops our concentration and focus, resulting in serenity and peace of mind
- 5) Better self-control- through concentration one can better handle one's emotions

However, Pranayama should not be forced and done without proper preparation or it may lead to nervous breakdowns. It is a part of a process in yoga. Breath control is a spiritual practice of cleansing the mind and body which should be done appropriately with proper guidance and preparation.

Importance of Healthy Breathing

We know how to breathe. It is something that occurs automatically. So it seems foolish to think that one can be told how to breathe. Yet, one's breathing becomes modified and restricted in various ways, not just momentarily, but habitually. We develop unhealthy habits without being aware of it. For example:

- 1) We tend to assume positions such as slouching that diminishes lung capacity
- 2) We live in social conditions that are not good for the health or our respiratory system
- 3) The more we concentrate on something, the tenser the muscles become
- 4) Breathing becomes shallow and quick which does not exercise the lungs enough, resulting in oxygen starvation

Animals which breathe slowly live the longest- the elephant and tortoise are good examples.

Importance of Breathing Through the Nose

- 1) The first rule of correct breathing is that we should breathe through the nose. The nose has various defense mechanisms to prevent impurities and excessive cold air entering the body.
- 2) Mouth breathing can adversely affect the development of the Thyroid Gland.

There are Four Types of Breathing:

- 1) High breathing- refers to what takes place primarily in the upper part of the chest and lungs. High breathing is naturally shallow.
- 2) Low breathing- refers to what takes place primarily in the lower part of the chest and lungs. It is far more effective than high or mid breathing. It consists mainly of moving the abdomen out and in changing the position of the diaphragm through such movements.
- 3) Middle breathing- difficult to describe. It is breathing in which mainly the middle parts of the lungs are filled with air. It is better than high breathing but far inferior to low breathing.
- 4) Complete breathing- defined by yoga, it involves the entire Respiratory System and does not only include the portions of the lungs.

Remember to practice Pranayama in a place where there is fresh and clear air and no smoke or other chemicals present in the atmosphere. This is because, in Pranayama, air will be pulled deeper into your lungs. It is also

important to practice it in an area at room temperature, where conditions are not too hot or too cold.