

Breathing Exercises

I. Alternate Nostril Breath:

Benefits:

The Alternate Nostril Breath –

- Has a marvellously calming effect on the nervous system
- Helps to overcome insomnia
- Relaxes and refreshes the body
- Purifies the bloodstream and aerates the lungs
- Soothes headaches
- Improves digestion and appetite
- Helps to free the mind of anxiety and depression

Technique:

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position with your back straight.
2. Raise your RIGHT hand and place your ring finger against your LEFT nostril, closing it off.
3. Inhale deeply and slowly through the RIGHT nostril to the count of 4.
4. Close off the RIGHT nostril with your thumb and hold the breath for a count of 1-4.
5. Open the LEFT nostril and exhale to the count of 4-8. The longer you can make the exhalation, the better. Concentrate on completely emptying the lungs.
6. Breathe in through that same LEFT nostril to the count of 4.
7. Close off the nostril with the ring finger again and hold to the count of 1-4.
8. Exhale through the RIGHT nostril to the count of 4-8. This makes up one round.
9. Repeat these rounds of alternate nostril breathing five more times, or for up ten minutes if you are concerned about insomnia.
10. Practice a ratio of 4:4:8, if at all possible. Increase this to 8:4:8 eventually, then 8:8:8, after some months.

Do's and Don'ts:

DO practice the Alternate Nostril Breath whenever you need calming – if you are nervous, upset or irritable.

DON'T push yourself with the holding position or by increasing the ratio until you are comfortable doing so.

DON'T make the breathing rhythmic; instead it should be smooth and slow. You can work on making it inaudible eventually.

The importance of this particular breath cannot be over-emphasised. The body and mind are closely interrelated and one influences the other to a much greater extent than medicine admitted to for many years. As an all-around “soother”, the Alternate Nostril Breath is incomparable.

II. Complete Breath:

Benefits:

The Complete Breath –

- Purifies the bloodstream and enriches it
- Develops the chest and diaphragm
- Strengthens lungs, thorax and abdomen
- Increases resistance to colds
- Calms the nervous system
- Aids digestion
- Clears up phlegm
- Helps to lift depression

Technique:

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position or in a chair.
2. Straighten your back, which will straighten your thorax for easier breathing.
3. Inhale slowly through the nose, breathing deeply, consciously.
4. Take five seconds to fill the lower part of the lungs, by expanding the ribs and pushing the abdomen out.
5. Concentrate on filling the top of the lungs for the next five seconds. This will expand the chest and tighten the abdomen slightly.
6. Hold the breath for 1-5 seconds.
7. Exhale slowly until you have emptied the lungs.
8. Repeat 4-5 times more.

Do's and Don'ts:

DO establish a rhythmic rise and fall of your abdomen, to promote regular breathing.

DO attempt to breathe inaudibly after you have gotten the knack of deep breathing.

DO concentrate on your breathing alone, with your eyes closed, if you wish. It serves to do the technique better but it is also a preparation for meditation.

DO push your abdomen out as you breathe in and pull the abdomen in as you breathe out.

DO give an extra snort as you exhale to rid yourself of stale waste-matter in the bottom of the lungs.

DON'T slump. For maximum efficiency the thorax must be straight.

III. The Cleansing Breath:

Benefits:

The Cleansing Breath –

- Clears lungs, sinuses and nasal passages
- Relieves colds
- Tones the nervous system
- Strengthens the lungs, thorax and abdomen
- Purifies the bloodstream and clears the head
- Aids digestion
- Stimulates the liver, spleen and pancreas

Technique:

1. Sit in a comfortable cross-legged position or a chair, back straight.
2. Inhale deeply, pushing the abdomen out, and taking in as much air as possible in the space of 1 second.
3. Whack your abdomen forcefully to expel the air through the nostrils. The sensation should be one of having been punched in the stomach.
4. Inhale again by pushing the abdomen out and letting the air rush back into the vacuum created by the exhalation.
5. The whole process, inhalation and exhalation should take not much more than 1-1/2 seconds. Both should be forceful and quite audible.
6. Repeat ten times, follow with a complete breath and repeat ten times more.

Do's and Don'ts:

DO push the abdomen out as far as you can as you inhale.

DON'T exhale consciously, but let the action of the abdomen do it for you.