

YOGA BREATHING PRACTICE

Kapalabhati

“Breath is seen as the outward manifestation of prana, the vital force or energy that flows through the physical body, but is actually in the Astral Body. By exercising control over breathing, you can learn to control the subtle energies within the body, and ultimately gain full control over the mind.”—Swami Vishnu-devananda

Kapalabhati or “Skull Shining” is a cleansing technique used to sweep out all of the stale air from the lungs and cleanse the energy pathways. It is considered to be so cleansing to the entire system that when practiced regularly, the face shines with good health and radiance.

Kapalabhati is an energizing practice, so it is the perfect way to start your morning. It is like sweeping the cobwebs out of your mind, bringing lots of fresh clean oxygen and energy to your entire system and opening up your energy passageways. Remember to use it as a tool when you are feeling tired instead of looking for a caffeine boost. It is also excellent for your skin. You will feel the benefits immediately, although the benefits increase greatly over time. We hold our breath in-between repetitions to concentrate our prana, or life force. Over time, you will be able to hold for longer durations, so be patient with yourself.

BASIC KAPALABHATI INSTRUCTIONS:

- Sit in a cross-legged position with the back straight and the head erect. Your hands can be in *chin mudra* (thumb and index finger touching) resting gently on your knees.
- Take two or three deep breaths to prepare for Kapalabhati.
- After the last inhalation, contract the abdominal muscles quickly, causing the diaphragm to move up into the thoracic cavity and pushing the air out of the lungs forcefully.
- Relax the abdominal muscles, allowing the diaphragm to descend into the abdominal cavity. Passive inhalation takes place—*no conscious inhale should occur*. The lungs automatically expand and inflate with air. Forcefully inhaling may cause you to start to hyperventilate. If you start to feel light-headed at any point, stop the practice and consult someone who knows the breath to gain a better understanding of how to practice.
- Repeat the pumping quickly using a passive inhalation and sudden expulsion of breath in a continuous series until the round is completed.

- At the end of the round, take three deep breaths. On the third inhalation, inflate your lungs until they are comfortably full (about 75% inflated) and retain your breath. It is easier to retain your breath if your lungs are not completely full. You can try for yourself to see that it is easier to retain your breath when your torso is relaxed rather than when your lungs are completely full and your chest and neck are compressed. The more you relax, the easier it will be to hold your breath.
- You can start with 30 rounds followed by a breath retention of 30 seconds, then 45 pumpings and a breath retention of 45 seconds, followed by 60 pumpings and a breath retention of 60 seconds. Over time, you can increase the number of repetitions to include rounds up to 100 pumpings. Try to practice at least 3 rounds of Kapalabhati daily. Never push yourself and always be patient with your body and mind. This is a healing practice.
- Enjoy and watch the effects of your body and mind as your practice deepens.

Anuloma Viloma

“Pranayama is the link between the mental and physical disciplines. While the action is physical, the effect is to make the mind calm, lucid and steady.”—Swami Vishnu-devananda

Anuloma Viloma, or “Alternate Nostril Breathing,” strengthens the respiratory system. As exhalation is twice as long as inhalation, stale air and waste products are drained and expelled from the lungs and the entire body. Anuloma Viloma calms and balances the mind and is an excellent practice for combating depression and stress. The practice balances the right and left hemispheres of the brain and also the polarities of life, such as yin / yang, sun / moon, hot / cold, masculine / feminine, calm / aggression, intuition / logic, holistic / analytic, emotion / ration, as well as the two energy pathways, or nadis that rise up through our body, the ida and the pingala. It is an excellent practice to do anytime you feel stressed or out of balance. 10 rounds a day are recommended.

BASIC ANULOMA VILOMA INSTRUCTIONS:

- Raise the right hand and bring it into *Vishnu mudra* by folding down the index and middle finger. Close the right nostril with the thumb and exhale completely through the left nostril. Your left hand rests on your knee in *chin mudra* (thumb and index finger touching)
- Inhale completely through the left nostril to a count of 4.
- Close the left nostril with the two end fingers so that both nostrils are now shut. Retain the breath for a count of 16.
- Lift the thumb to release the right nostril and exhale fully to a count of 8.
- Keeping the left nostril closed, inhale through the right nostril to a count of 4.

- Close both nostrils and retain the breath now to a count of 16. Release the left nostril and exhale to a count of 8 to complete one round.
- Repeat the full process 10 times.
- Always relax for a moment with your eyes closed after completing pranayama to experience the effects of your practice.

Three-Part Yogic Breath

Practice this calming breath to relax your body and mind. The practice is perfect to do before you get out of bed in the morning or before you go to sleep at night.

- Place your right hand on your abdomen, your left hand on your chest.
- Breathe slowly and deeply into your abdomen first, inflating it like a balloon.
- Feel your chest rise up as you inhale into your chest.
- Feel your upper chest rise as your lungs inflate fully all the way up to the clavicle.
- Exhale squeezing your abdomen in first, then your chest. Make sure to squeeze all the air out to create more space for clean air on the next inhalation.
- Repeat the breath 10 times.
- Close your eyes and feel your body relaxing from your toes to the top of your head.

Kumbakh Relaxation Breath

This breath is used to slow down the mind in preparation for meditation. It is also an excellent breath to do before falling asleep at night to still the thinking mind. Slowing down the breath gives the lungs, heart and body systems a profound rest. The breath reflects the state of the mind... and the mind reflects the state of the breath. If the mind is agitated, the breath will be disturbed and uneven. When the mind is calm and peaceful, the breath will be slow and even. In deep meditation, the body's oxygen requirement is reduced and, therefore, the breath becomes almost still. Prana, the body's vital energy, is also created during this breath, charging the body's inner battery in the solar plexus and allowing prana to flow throughout the entire body.

- With your eyes closed, inhale for seven seconds.
- Hold the breath for seven seconds.
- Exhale for seven seconds.
- Hold the breath for seven seconds.

- Repeat 12-15 times. If seven seconds is too difficult to hold, use 5 or 3 second intervals.

Pendulum Relaxation Breath

This breath is also used to slow down the breath in preparation for meditation or sleep. The breath becomes almost imperceptible at the end, allowing the thinking mind to slow down and the body to enter a deep state of relaxation.

- Picture a pendulum hanging down in front of your face. As you inhale, the pendulum swings up to the right, as you exhale, the pendulum swings down and over to the left. Watch the pendulum for several natural breaths.
- Inhale for 10 seconds as the pendulum swings up to the right.
- Exhale for 10 seconds as the pendulum swings down and then to the left.
- On the next inhale, the pendulum swings up to the right slightly lower than on the first breath as you inhale for 9 seconds.
- Exhale for 9 seconds as the pendulum swings down and up to the left, slightly lower than the 10 second breath.
- Continue counting down with each breath. Inhaling for 8 seconds (pendulum coming still slightly lower), exhaling for 8 seconds. Counting down 7,6,5,4,3,2,1, each time the pendulum swinging less and less.
- By the time the pendulum reaches 1, the breath should be calm and gentle. The mind should be still.
- If the mind is still active or the breath is agitated, repeat the series of breaths several more times until the mind calms down, starting at 10 and working down to 1.
- Once the mind is calm, begin meditation or drift off to sleep.