

# BREATHING TECHNIQUES

The key to our life force and energy is the breath. A person who has strong lungs and good breathing capacity usually has abundant energy. When the mind is clear and balanced, the breath is even and rhythmic. When the mind is nervous and tense, the breath is strained and erratic. These breathing techniques can be used for calming, centering, and relaxation. Do these exercises through the nose unless the sinuses are congested. The best way to practice these techniques is on an empty stomach in a quiet place where there is a supply of fresh air. Create time in the early morning to practice so the mind and body are ready for the day. A regular practice creates a good habit and builds the benefits slowly. However, these breathing techniques can be practiced throughout the day before, during, and after stressful situations or meetings or as a practice of relaxation.

## **NATURAL BREATH, DIAPHRAGMATIC BREATH** - Abdominal Breath

Lie on your back or sit comfortably with a straight spine and relax. As you inhale, the downward movement of the diaphragm should push your stomach outward. As you exhale, the stomach will sink back down. This correct breathing feels almost like the stomach is moving the air or is actually filling with air. Find the rhythm of breath that is smooth and most relaxing for your body.

Natural breathing relaxes the nervous system, reduces stress, massages and tones the heart and the digestive system. It is efficient breathing so the heart and the lungs work less and rest more. The breath is down in the abdomen, the chest is relaxed. After breathing like this for awhile then move on to the Complete Breath.

## **COMPLETE BREATH** - Dirgha Pranayama

The next step is to learn to fill the lungs completely. Slowly inhale, bring the air into the bottom of the lungs with the diaphragm. Then continue inhaling to open and expand the rib cage upward and out to the sides. Continue to inhale up under the shoulders to fill the lungs completely. the exhale slowly from the top to the bottom of the lungs. Contract the abdominal muscles at the end of the exhalation to squeeze out all of the residual air.

The Complete Breath uses the full capacity of the lungs, removing stale air and toxins. It keeps the chest and lungs flexible and relaxed. it increases overall energy, renews the entire system, improves digestion and elimination. After breathing like this for awhile and it starts to feel natural then continue with the Ocean Sounding Breath.

## **THE OCEAN SOUNDING BREATH** - Ujjayi Breath

Sit comfortably with the spine straight, take a few deep breaths and relax. Whisper the word **home**, holding the **mmm..** sound for a few seconds. Now whisper **home** on the inhalation and the exhalation. Don't make the sound too loud and keep

it smooth and even. When you are able to whisper the sound through the mouth evenly in and out, close the mouth and continue the sound through the nostrils on inhalation and exhalation. Continue with long deep breaths.

The Ocean Sounding Breath is deeply relaxing and soothing. The breath is lengthened and the air is drawn to the bottom of the lungs. The mind becomes absorbed and focused by the sound which induces meditation. It heightens awareness and enhances creativity.

**SKULL POLISHING BREATH, BREATH OF FIRE** -Kapalabhati Pranayama Sitting with an erect spine, take some deep breaths and relax. Exhale forcefully through the nostrils contracting the abdominal muscles, then relax the abdomen immediately, the inhalation will happen passively. Repeat slowly at first to make sure the belly is relaxing after the contraction, then pick up the pace finding your own rhythm. The breath is in the abdomen, the chest is relaxed.

Start slowly with 10-20 repetitions, over time progress to 70-100 repetitions per round. If you feel short of breath slow down to allow more time for the inhalation. To do Alternate Nostril Kapalabhati close the right nostril with the right thumb, exhale sharply. Close the left nostril with the ring finger, exhale sharply. Continue.

The Skull Polishing Breath strengthens the abdominal muscles, diaphragm and heart. It deeply massages the internal organs, stimulates digestion and elimination. Removes stale air and toxins from the lungs and pumps fresh air and energy into all cells of the body. It energizes, massages and cleanses the central nervous system bringing mental clarity, alertness. Done through alternating nostrils it has a balancing effect. Menstruation, Pregnancy, Colitis, Surgery (recent), Emphysema, Hernia, and Unmedicated high blood pressure are contraindicated for the Skull Polishing Breath. If you have any of these conditions you may do the Ocean Sounding Breath or the Complete Breath.

**ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATH** - Nadi Shodhana

Sitting straight, relax your breath and your body. Use the right thumb and right ring finger for Alternate Nostril Breathing. Close the right nostril with the thumb and exhale through the left nostril. Inhale through the left, close using the ring finger and exhale through the right. Inhale through the right, close, exhale left. Continue with smooth, deep breathing through alternating nostrils.

Alternate Nostril Breath stimulates the brain side-to-side, synchronizes the hemispheres, and balances any dominance. It strengthens, calms, and regulates the nervous system, eliminates wastes and increases assimilation of energy. If you experience dizziness during breathing exercises then slow down your breathing. If you are gasping, speed up the breath. Breathe less deep if there is nausea.

*Kripalu Center, Lenox, MA*

**Nancy Plumer, New Visions, P.O. Box 4092, Kingston, NY 12402  
(914) 388-7155 email: [Nplumer@hvi.net](mailto:Nplumer@hvi.net)**