

THE ESSENCE OF YOGA: YOGA BASICS WEEK 2

I. WHAT IS PRANAYAMA?

Pranayama is an in-depth science for expanding and channeling the life force, prana. "Pranayama" comes from two Sanskrit words: "prana", meaning the fundamental life force, and "yama" meaning to control. Pranayama is, therefore channeling or controlling the life force. "Pranayama" can also be seen as the combination of "pran", the life force, with "ayama", meaning expansion. In this sense pranayama expands the life force through all levels of our being, physical, psychological and spiritual.

The key to understanding prana is the breath. 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. One who has strong lungs and great breathing capacity usually has abundant energy.

Pranayama is a bridge between the conscious and the unconscious and serves to integrate body, mind, and spirit. Unlike other muscles which can supposedly either be controlled (the muscles of the arms) or not (the internal organs), the diaphragm is both a voluntary and an involuntary muscle. It, therefore, links the conscious and unconscious functioning of the body. A central focus of yoga is to make what is unconscious conscious. Pranayama brings the breath and prana into consciousness.



II. BREATH AWARENESS

"Learning to breathe well is not an additive process in which you learn specific techniques for improving the breath you already have. It is a process of deconstruction where you learn to identify the things you are already doing that restrict the natural emergence of the breath." *Donna Farhi*

Breath awareness exercise 1: Becoming aware of your natural breath

Settle into Easy Rest or any comfortable position.

Count your breath. How quickly do you breathe? 12-14 breaths per minute is about average.

Draw your attention to the movement of the breath. Place one hand on your belly below the navel and one hand on the breast bone in the center of the chest. Where is the movement of the breath most noticeable? Relax your hands at your sides with your palms up.

Draw your attention to the inhale and the exhale. Is there a noticeable difference between the length of your inhale and the length of your exhale or are they equal? How deeply do you inhale? How completely do you exhale? Where do you feel the breath? What does the breath sound like as it flows in? as it flows out?

Draw your attention to the transitions or pauses between the inhale and the exhale. Are the transitions between the inhale and the exhale of equal length? Do you pause or is it completely smooth at each transition?

Draw your attention to the flow of the breath. Is the flow of your breath smooth and even or jerky and uneven? Does the flow slow down, speed up, or seem to get stuck along the way?

III. DIRGHA PRANAYAMA: THREE PART YOGIC BREATH

instructions: Slowly inhale and 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. Then 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.

general benefits: Dirgha Pranayama is calming. (student anecdote!) It slows the breathing process increasing the amount of carbon dioxide in the bloodstream so that the body learns to function more efficiently using less oxygen (fuel). Dirgha Pranayama 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, and improves digestion and elimination.

IV. ADHI MUDRA

instructions: Curl the fingers around the thumbs forming a soft fist with the thumb held inside it. Place the hands palms down on the thighs or knees.

benefits: This mudra soothes and calms the nervous system. It facilitates Three-Part Breath, especially in the abdomen and the back of the body.

V. BENEFITS OF FORWARD BENDS

Forward Bends massage and decongest the abdominal organs. They improve peristalsis and help relieve constipation and hemorrhoids. They build strength, increase flexibility in the hips, and decongest the spine. They calm the body and mind.

Careful! If you suffer from Sciatica, keep the spine elongated without rounding down. Simply do not practice forward bends if the problem is acute. If you have uncontrolled high blood pressure or a heart condition, do not raise your arms overhead.

VI. ASANA

1. Standing Forward Fold
2. 5 Pointed Star
3. Standing Wide-Legged Forward Fold
4. Warrior 2
5. Side Angle Pose
6. Head to Knee Pose
7. Seated Twist
8. Sphinx / Cobra
9. Tree

VII. HOMEWORK

- Remember Mountain Pose! Check your posture when standing, for example, while waiting to check out at the supermarket.
- Scan your body and consciously relax the areas of tension. Try "contract and release."
- Try Adhi Mudra! Does it help you to deepen your breath and relax?
- Check your breath. Find one or two things that happen regularly during the day that will remind you to check your breath. Remember to fill your lungs completely with 3 part yogic breathing!
- Practice Ahimsa, and notice your self-critical thoughts.
- Stretch every day. Then, practice a pose ,, or two!

 you•go•yoga	THE ESSENCE OF YOGA: YOGA BASICS week 2 practice
WARM UPS	Seated: Dirgha Pranayama w/ Adhi Mudra neck release shoulder shrugs, circles Supine w/ strap: Leg Circles Supine Triangle (tip! Engage extended leg.) Supine Revolved Triangle
ASANA	Sphinx (tip! Isometrically pull back on the elbows and drop tailbone to lengthen the spine.)/Cobra Child's Pose / windshield wiper the calves Downward-Facing Dog (tip! Roll mat or use washcloths for your wrists.) Breath of Joy (tip! Remember 3 part yogic breath.) Mountain (tip! Check alignment using wall. Use block to engage legs) Tree Half Moon Series (tip! Check shoulder alignment against wall. Lift from the waist.) Standing Forward Fold (tip! Raise the floor with a block.) Warrior 1 (tip! Ground the front heel and outer edge of back foot.) 5 Pointed Star Wide-Legged Forward Fold (tip! Raise the floor with a block.) Warrior 2 (tip! Keep your shoulders against the "wall".) Side Angle Pose Staff Pose (tip! Sit on the edge of a blanket.) Seated Forward Bend (tip! Use a strap to keep your back straight.) Head to Knee Pose (tip! Engage the extended leg!) Seated Twist (tip! Lengthen the spine with the inhale. Soften into the twist with the exhale.)
COOLDOWN	Wind-Relieving Pose Hip Lifts Windshield Wipers Sacrum Release Happy Baby
RELAXATION	Contraction and Release / Directing the breath

THE ESSENCE OF YOGA: WEEK 2 PRACTICE					
 Sukhasana Easy	Neck Release Shoulder Shrugs Shoulder Circles	 Supta Padangusthasana Reclining Big Toe Pose	Supine Triangle Supine Revolved Triangle		
 Sphinx	 Bhujangasana Cobra	 Balasana Child's Pose	 Adho Mukha Svanasana Downward Facing Dog	Breath of Joy	
 Tadasana Mountain	 Standing Side Bend	 Uttanasana Standing Forward Bend	 Virabhadrasana I Warrior I		
 5-Pointed Star	 Prasarita Padottanasana Wide-Legged Forward Bend	 Virabhadrasana II Warrior II	 Utthita Parsvakonasana Extended Side Angle	 Tadasana Mountain	 Vrksasana Tree
 Dandasana Staff	 Paschimottanasana Seated Forward Bend	 Janu Sirsasana Head to Knee	 Marichyasana III Marichi's Pose III		
 Apanasana Knees to Chest	Hip Lifts Windshield Wipers Sacrum Release	 Ananda Balasana Happy Baby	 Savasana Corpse		

www.yougoyoga.net

Click on *Student Resources* → *Home Practice*. both spaces: *ygystudent*