

## THE ESSENCE OF YOGA: YOGA BASICS WEEK 3

### 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?

### **Breath awareness exercise 2: Point to Point breathing through the body**

Inhale deeply. Then, exhale from the crown of your head down to your toes. Inhale back to the crown of the head. Exhale from the crown of your head down to your toes. Inhale back to the crown of the head.

Exhale from the crown of the head down to the ankles, Inhale back up to the crown  
Exhale from the crown to the level of the knees. Inhale back up to the crown  
Exhale from the crown to the base of the spine. Inhale back up to the crown  
Exhale from the crown to the navel center. Inhale back up to the crown  
Exhale from the crown to the heart center. Inhale back up to the crown  
Exhale from the crown the throat. Inhale back up to the crown

Exhale down to the level of the eyebrow center. Inhale back up to the crown. Down to the eyebrow center. Up to the crown. (3more X\

Now, exhale down to the throat center. Inhale back up to the crown.  
 Exhale from the crown to the heart center. Inhale back up to the crown.  
 Exhale from the crown to the navel center. Inhale back up to the crown.  
 Exhale from the crown to the base of the spine. Inhale back up to the crown.  
 Exhale from the crown to the level of the knees. Inhale back up to the crown.  
 Exhale from the crown to the ankles. Inhale back up to the crown.  
 Exhale from the crown to the toes. Inhale back up to the crown.

Now feel the exhalation flow down through the body and out through the soles of the feet continuing on to infinity. Feel the inhalation return through the soles of the feet, flow up through your body and out the crown of the head continuing on to infinity. Let the exhalation flow downward as if the breath is flowing through the soles of the feet and on to infinity. Inhaling, breathe as if the breath is a wave flowing upward through the body out the crown of the head and on to infinity. Sense that you are lying in the center of a wave of energy. Watch the wave of your breath breath as you relax your body, breath, and mind.

*(based on an exercise developed by Joseph LePage)*

### III. KAKI PRANAYAMA VARIATION: BEAK BREATH TO LENGTHEN EXHALATION

**instructions:** Inhale naturally through the nose. Then, form a beak with the mouth, as if you were blowing through a straw, and exhale, completely emptying the lungs.

**general benefits:** Although it is counterintuitive, a more complete exhalation will automatically deepen your inhalations. Luxuriating in long and complete exhalations assures the body that all is well, so by consciously lengthening the exhalation we encourage our bodies to relax even in tense situations.

### IV. HAKINI MUDRA

**HAKINI MUDRA instructions:** Gently press together the tips or pads of all the fingers until you sense the best energetic connection.

**HAKINI MUDRA benefits:** This mudra benefits your overall health and level of energy. It opens the emotions and engages the witness, improving awareness. This is a balancing mudra.

### V. BENEFITS OF TWISTS AND BACK EXTENSIONS

**TWISTS:** Twists extend and align the spine. They increase circulation of blood in the spine, maintain flexibility of the spine, and help prevent back strain and sciatica. They slim the

hips and waistline. They balance the nervous system. They stimulate peristalsis, improve digestion and help relieve constipation.

**Careful!** Be careful or avoid if you have herniated discs or sacroiliac problems.

**BACK EXTENSIONS:** Back extensions strengthen the back muscles, stretch the abdominal muscles, expand the chest and rib cage, and tone the buttocks. They irrigate the kidneys. They bring awareness to the breath and to the back body.


**Careful!** Be careful if you have had a recent back injury or abdominal surgery.





















## VI. ASANA

1. Sphinx / Cobra
2. Tree
3. Warrior 2
4. Side Angle Pose
5. Goddess
6. Bound Angle Pose
7. Head to Knee Pose

## VII. HOMEWORK

1. Check your posture when standing, for example, while waiting to check out at the supermarket.
2. Scan your body and consciously relax the areas of tension.
3. Try Hakini Mudra! Does it help you to feel more open and balanced?
4. Try Adhi Mudra. Does it help you to feel more calm?
5. Check your breath. Find one or two things that happen regularly during the day that will remind you to check your breath. Become a neutral observer.
6. Remember to fill your lungs completely with 3 part yogic breathing!
7. Try relaxing into the exhalation.
8. Practice Ahimsa, and notice your self-critical thoughts.
9. Stretch every day. Then, practice a pose ,, or two!

 you•go•yoga	<b>THE ESSENCE OF YOGA: YOGA BASICS</b> <b>week 3 practice</b>
<b>WARM UPS</b>	On back head rolls (tip! stretch fingers of opposite hand away from your ear.) neck and shoulder release with elbows clasped in box over chest. lift leg and press thigh into palms knee down twist reclined Tree reclined Bound Angle Pose Bridge warm-ups
<b>ASANA</b>	Locust (tip! Keep your hips pressed into the floor.) Sphinx (tip! Use your forearms for traction to lengthen the spine.) Cobra (tip! Drop your tailbone and support your lower back with the abdomen. Keep your neck and chin neutral.) Child's Pose  Downward Facing Dog → Three-Legged Dog Warrior 1  Mountain Pose Warrior 2 (r) (tip! Ground the front heel and the outer edge of the back foot.) Side Angle Pose (r) Triangle (r) 5 Pointed Star (r) Wide Legged Forward Fold (tip! Fold from the hip crease.) (repeat from Warrior 2 to the left.) Wide-Legged Forward Fold with Twist Goddess  Tree Bound Angle Pose Head to Knee (tip! Keep the extended leg engaged.) Seated Twist (tip! Lengthen up with each inhalation. Twist deeper with each exhalation.) Relaxed Seated Forward Fold (tip! Feel safe, and draw your awareness inward.)
<b>COOLDOWN</b>	Wind-Relieving Pose (knees to chest) Spinal Rocks hip lifts sacrum release
<b>RELAXATION</b>	Point to point breathing through the body Hakini Mudra

week 3 practice					
 Ardha Shalabhasana Half Locust	 Sphinx	 Bhujangasana Cobra	 Kumara Svanasana Downward Dog - Hip Opening	 Balasana Child's Pose	
 Adho Mukha Svanasana Downward Facing Dog	 Kumara Svanasana Downward Dog - Hip Opening	 Virabhadrasana I Warrior I	 Tadasana Mountain		
 Virabhadrasana II Warrior II	 Utthita Parsvakonasana Extended Side Angle	 Utthita Trikonasana Extended Triangle	 5-Pointed Star	 Prasarita Padottanasana Wide-Legged Forward Bend	wide-legged forward bend with twist
 Goddess	 Vrksasana Tree	 Baddha Konasana Bound Angle	 Janu Sirsasana Head to Knee	 Marichyasana III Marichi's Pose III	 Paschimottasana Seated Forward Bend

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