

TRADITIONAL PRĀṆĀYĀMA TECHNIQUES

anuloma ujjāyi A basic pranayama technique emphasizing the effortless and natural ease of the breath. It is performed by breathing through alternative nostrils and uses ujjāyi breathing on the inhalation breath and a calm, natural, long, and smooth exhalation breath to help relax the nervous system.

anuloma viloma anuloma = “with the hair,” with the grain, regular
viloma = “against the hair,” other than ordinary

Commonly referred to as “alternate nostril breathing,” this is a pranayama technique that traditionally involves inhaling through one nostril, retaining the breath, and exhaling through the other nostril in a ratio of 2:8:4 (inhale:retention:exhale), though other variations of the breathing ratio are often applied for various purposes. With respect to yogic breathing, anuloma refers to inhalation through both nostrils and exhalation alternately through either nostril that is affected with pauses, rather than with a single smooth movement. The technique is said to restore, equalize, and balance the flow of prana (energy) in the body and sometimes includes skipping the kumbhaka (retention of breath) and breathing with a balanced 1:1 or a parasympathetic-inducing 1:2 inhale to exhale ratio when used in therapeutic situations to decrease potential stress.

bhastrikā Defined as “bellows breath,” this pranayama technique combines anuloma viloma (alternate nostril breathing) with kapalabhati (skull shining breathing) and is performed by breathing forcibly through the nostrils aiming toward equal intensity and time for both inhalations and exhalations like the pumping of a blacksmith’s bellows. It is good for sluggishness, depression, a slow metabolism, and digestive issues.

candra bhedana or chandra bhedana Lit. “moon piercing.” A prāṇāyāma breathing technique of inhaling through the left nostril and exhaling through the right nostril, thus amplifying the cool “lunar” energy conducted through the idā nāḍī, clearing and purifying the major energy channel on the left side of the body.

dirga breathing Also called “dirgha prāṇāyāma,” this basic breathing technique employs a three-part complete breath that completely fills the thorax beginning in the abdomen, then continuing to the diaphragm/ribcage, and lastly filling the chest on a long, slow, and smooth inhalation breath (and the exhalation breath simply reverses the flow of the inhale) utilizing the full capacity of the lungs.

kapālabhāti One of the six shat karmas (cleansing techniques) mentioned in the Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā and literally meaning “skull shining,” this is a joy-inducing diaphragmatic breathing technique that is performed with forceful exhalations followed by passive inhalations. Essentially, the lower belly near the umbilicus is quickly contracted or pumped as air is pushed out of the lungs and the passive release of the contraction allows the belly to rebound and suck air into the lungs. This technique has been shown to be effective in gastroparesis, sluggishness, head fogginess, depression, stress, and to cleanse the sinuses of the head.

nāḍī-śodhana-prāṇāyāma Literally defined as “nerve cleansing,” “channel purification,” or “channel clearing breathing” and commonly referred to as “alternate nostril breathing” or anuloma viloma, this is a pranayama technique that is said “to balance the sun and moon” and restore, equalize, and balance the flow of prana (energy) in the body and the idā and piṅgalā nāḍī, which begin at the mūlādhāra chakra and terminate at the left and right nostrils, respectively. It involves inhaling through one nostril and exhaling through the other nostril with the breath being natural and effortless. While the Gheranda Samhita says that traditionally nadi shodhana includes breath retention, fixed ratio breathing, and the repetition of bija (seed) mantras, beginners usually skip the kumbhaka (breath retention) and the fixed ratios to help make the technique more accessible and further calm the nerves, decrease anxiety and stress, and harmonize the mind. Eventually, in the advanced technique, breath retentions and fixed ratios are added back in like in

