

**Body Mind Yoga
Information Sheet**

Alternate nostril breathing Nadi Shodhana

Alternate nostril breathing, otherwise known as nadi shodhana in Sanskrit, is a safe and relaxing breathing technique. "Nadi" is translated as "subtle energy channel" and "shodhana" means "purification". Thus nadi shodhana purifies the bodies' subtle energy system and has a very calming effect on the mind.

How to practice

Assume a sitting position, with your back comfortably straight. If you cannot sit comfortably in a yogic posture a chair is fine – the main thing is for the spine to be fairly straight. If you are practicing to help you sleep at night, then lying down on your back in bed, can work well.

Bring your right hand up and place the fore finger and middle finger between the eyebrows (nasagra mudra). Use the right thumb to close off the right nostril and breathe in through the left nostril. Then close the left nostril with the ring finger, release the thumb and breathe out through the right nostril. Breathe back in through the right nostril, close with the thumb and out the left again. This makes one round.

Continue like this – out and in through one nostril, then out and in through the other. Keep the breath comfortable and relaxed. There is no need to strain.

Practice tips

1. Keep your breath natural and relaxed. You don't need to deepen or lengthen the breath and definitely don't strain or force the breath.
2. If you find that one nostril is blocked or the nose feels a bit stuffy, then close the other nostril and do a few short sharp sniffs through the open nostril. If necessary, repeat on the other side.

3. When you first practice start with 1 or 2 minutes. Slowly build up to 5 minutes.
4. If your right arm becomes tired, you can support the right arm by holding under the elbow with the left hand.
5. If you are left handed you might prefer to use your left hand – in which case your thumb closes your left nostril and your ring finger closes your right nostril.
6. If you are incorporating alternate nostril breathing into your yoga practice you would do after the asanas and before the meditation.
7. Although a formal practice is useful, this practice can be used in your daily life when you are feeling upset or stressed. To just stop and do a minute or two of alternate nostril breathing can bring you back to your centre; back to balance.

Benefits

1. Alternate nostril breathing is a great balancer. It balances the left and right brain hemispheres, the nervous system and the hormonal system – and thus it is particularly useful for women to do to help with pmt and menopause.
3. It clears the mind and improves concentration and memory – making it excellent for those engaging in mental work (but don't do too much!).
4. It is a very calming technique and can help to reduce feelings of stress and anxiety, while at the same time increasing vitality.
5. It's a great preparation for meditation – bringing the mind quite quickly into theta brain wave – deeply settled mind.
6. Alternate nostril breathing can help to clear the nose and sinuses, however if really blocked don't force the breath and practice anuloma viloma (psychic alternate nostril breathing) instead.
7. It's a wonderful practice for insomnia – particularly if you notice one nostril is blocked and your mind is thinking and thinking – just 5 minutes may help to rebalance and calm and help you get to sleep.

Precautions

1. Never force the breath during alternate nostril breathing – if you feel like you are straining then discontinue the practice.
2. Gradually build up your practice, start with the basic practice and gradually build up the time. Only move on when you are very comfortable.
3. This should not be practiced straight after eating – wait at least an hour.

More advanced practices

1. Psychic alternate nostril breathing – Anuloma Viloma

Once you have become really comfortable with alternate nostril breathing, you can start to practice psychic alternate nostril breathing.

This is where you breathe normally, but imagine you are breathing through alternate nostrils.

Start by breathing naturally and comfortably and having your awareness on the breath at the nostrils. Imagine the breath goes in and up through both nostrils and meets at a point in between the eyebrows. Then breathe out and the breath separates and goes down and out through the nostrils. Do this a few more times so you have a sense of the triangular shape of the breath.

Then imagine the breath comes in through the left nostril and up to the eyebrow centre and down the right nostril. Back in the right to the eyebrow centre and down the left – continue like that.

After practicing regularly you may find that you can actually control the breath moving in the nostrils without using your hands – so you are actually breathing in and out through alternate nostrils. If you focus your attention behind the nose above the upper palate you can find the switch that controls this (it's a subtle muscular contraction).

This practice is more effective if you can count the breaths, otherwise there is a tendency for the mind drift off. Counting keeps the mind focused.

You can start by counting backwards from 9. So in 9, out 9, in 9 out 9...in 8, out 8, in 8, out 8....and so on. When you get to 5, breathe in and out

through both nostrils together twice before continuing with the alternate nostril breathing. When you get to 0 breathe in through both nostrils before starting from 9 again.

2. Nadi Shodhana with controlled breathing and Anta Kumbhaka (inner breath retention)

Now instead of breathing naturally the duration of the in breath and the out breath is controlled/measured and the breath is held in.

So see if you can: breathe in for a count of 3 through one nostril; then hold the breath in for a count of 3 before swapping nostrils and breathing out for a count of 3. After each exhalation, inhale immediately through that nostril again for a count of 3 and continue like that.

When this is easy for you, extend the counting to 5.

Practice 10 rounds of this.