

PRANAYAM

IMPORTANCE OF PRANAYAM AND ITS BENEFITS

Pranayam has the capacity of freeing the mind from untruthfulness, ignorance and all other painful and unpleasant experiences of the body and mind; and when the mind becomes clean it becomes easy for the Sadhak/sadhika to concentrate on the desired object and it becomes possible for him to progress further in the direction of Dhyana and Samadhi.

By Yog asanas, we remove the distortions and disabilities of the physical body and bring it into discipline. However Pranayams influence the subtle and the physical bodies in a greater measure than Yogasanas and that too in a perceptible manner. In the human body, lungs, heart and brain hold very important position and depend on each other heavily for their health.

Physically, Pranayam appears to be a systematic exercise of respiration, which makes the lungs stronger, improves blood circulation, makes the man healthier and bestows upon him the boon of a long life. Physiology teaches us that the air (Prana) we breathe in fills our lungs and spreads in the entire body, providing it its essential form. The lungs take the healthy air to the heart and throw the useless material like carbon dioxide out through the act of exhalation. If this action of the respiratory system is done regularly and efficiently, lungs become stronger and blood becomes pure.

However, most of the people do not have the habit of breathing deeply with the result that only one-fourth part of the lungs is brought into action and 75 percent remains idle. Like the honeycomb, lungs are made of about 73 million cells, comparable to a sponge in their making. In normal breathing, to which all of us are accustomed, only about 20 million pores in the lungs get oxygen, whereas remaining 53 million pores remain deprived of it, with the result that they get contaminated by several diseases like tuberculosis, respiratory diseases and ailments like coughing, bronchitis etc.

In this way, the inefficient functioning of the lungs affects the process of blood purification. Heart weakens because of this with a constant possibility of untimely death. It is for this reason that the importance of Pranayam has come to be recognised for a healthy long life. Several diseases can be averted by regular practice of Pranayam. Hence, it is obvious that the knowledge of the science of Pranayama and its regular practice enables a man to lead a healthy and long life. It is for this reason that in several Hindu religious rites, Pranayam is found to have been introduced as an essential element.

Mental disturbances like excitement, anxiety, fear, anger, disappointment, lust for sex (lasciviousness) and other mental perversions can be calmed down by regular practice of Pranayam. Besides, Pranayam practice improves the functions of the brain cells with the result that memory and the faculty of discrimination and observation improves, making concentration and meditation easy for the Sadhak/sadhika.

Another benefit of Pranayam is that by its regular practice, habit of deep breathing is developed which results in several health benefits. It is said that the nature determines our life span on the basis of the number of respirations we do.

SOME RULES FOR PRANAYAM

Select a clean and peaceful place for doing Pranayama.

Sit in any of the Asanas, viz. Padmasana, Sidhasana or Vajrasana, whichever you find convenient.

Breathe only through the nose. Make it a habit to respire only through nose during daytime too. Nasal respiration keeps the temperature of the Nadis - 'Ida', 'Pingala' and 'Sushumna' even. It also prevents foreign and harmful objects from getting into lungs.

Like 'Yog', Pranayama should also be performed four or five hours after taking food. In the morning Pranayama should be done after cleansing mouth, emptying of bowels etc. In the beginning, Pranayama should be done for five or ten minutes. Gradually the time should be increased up to about 1/2 or 1 hour. Maintain a specific rhythm. In case of bowels not cleaning up in the morning, take terminalia chebula (Indian Hardaya) or any other mild laxative before sleeping. Kapala-bhati Pranayama, if done regularly for a few days will help in curing constipation. Keep 15-20 minutes interval between Pranayama and bath.

Methods of Pranayama may be varied according to the seasons and your own physical make up and mental attitude. Some Pranayamas increase the body temperature, whereas, some bring it down. Some Pranayamas maintain the temperature at the normal level.

If you feel fatigued, rest for sometime and then begin deep breathing, which will remove the fatigue.

Pregnant women, hungry persons, persons suffering from fever and those who are lustful having no control on their passions should not do Pranayama. If you are sick, keep in mind the instructions to be followed by sick persons while during Pranayama.

Food should be 'Sattvika' - (Plain and simple, non-spicy). Use of cow's milk, ghee, fruits and green vegetables can be said to be ideal food. Moderation also is a good rule to observe.

Do not strain yourself during 'Kumbhak' i.e. retaining the breathed air inside or keeping the air out (Breathing in -- 'puraka', retaining the breathed air in -- 'Kumbhak' and exhaling the air -- 'Recak').

Pranayama does not mean just breathing in, keeping the breathed air in and exhaling it. It means controlling the entire breathing process, and maintaining mental equilibrium and concentration of mind.

Chant 'Aum' aloud and repeat the same several times before Pranayama. Recital of sacred songs or some sacred hymns will also calm your mind. A peaceful mind is also very essential while doing Pranayamas.

None of your organs -- mouth, eyes, nose, etc. should be put to any strain. All the organs should be kept in normal condition. Sit in an erect position. Keep your spine and neck straight.

For acquiring proficiency in Pranayama do not depend on books or what is done and preached by others. Seek the guidance of an expert and do Pranayama under his direct supervision.

Several methods of Pranayama have been advocated and each of them has its own benefits. With the blessings of our teachers and with our experience, we have evolved seven methods of Pranayama, which have been found scientific. They have been found useful from a spiritual point of view. All the seven Pranayamas can be done in a time bound programme of about 20 minutes.

These Pranayamas done daily and regularly give following benefits:

Vata, pitta and Kapha get adjusted in proper proportion and abnormalities in them are removed.

Digestive system improves and diseases pertaining to digestive organs are cured.

Diseases pertaining to lungs, heart and brain are also cured.

Obesity, Diabetes, Cholesterol, Constipation, Flatulence, Acidity, Respiratory troubles, Allergy, Migraine, High blood pressure, diseases pertaining to kidneys, sexual disorders of males and females etc. are cured.

Resistance against diseases is stepped up. Immunity develops.

Hereditary diseases like diabetes and heart disease are avoided.

Falling of hair or its premature graying, appearance of wrinkles on face or other parts of the body at young age, diminution of eyesight, forgetfulness, etc. are relieved and process of aging is retarded.

Face becomes bright, luminous and calm.

Energy Chakras are cleansed and enable the practitioner to awaken the Kundalini.

Mind becomes stable and tranquil. A sense of contentment and enthusiasm or zeal develops. Conditions like depression are relieved.

Performance of yogic exercises like meditation will be easy.

All the diseases of the physical and etheric bodies will be cured. Freedom from negative and harmful mental conditions like anger, lasciviousness, greed for money, arrogance etc. will be achieved.

All the physical and mental disorders and abnormalities are cured and toxins eradicated from the body.

Freedom from negative thinking is achieved and the mind develops the habit of positive and constructive thinking.

PRAANAAYAAMA SAADHANA

Firstly we pray to purify ourselves.

Breathe deep. Exhale slowly pronouncing ‘Aum’ as longer as possible. This will be done thrice.

Then the following Ved Mantras:

Aum Bhoor-bhuvah Swah Tat-savitur-varenyam Bhargo Devasya Dheemahi Dhiyo Yo Nah Prachodayaat.

Aum Trayambakam Yajamahe Sugandhim Pushtivardhanam.

Urvaarukamiva Bandhanaan-mrityor-muksheeya maa-amritaam.

Aum Saha Naavavatu, Saha Nau Bhunaktu, Saha Veeryam Karvaavahe,
Tejasvinaavadheetamastu Maa Vidwishavahai.

Aum Asato Maa Sad-gamaya, Tamaso Maa Jyotir-gamaya, Mrityor-mamritam Gamaya.

Aum Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih.

SEVEN PRAANAAYAAMAS

Bhastrika: Sit erect in Siddhaasana, Padmaasana, Sukhaasana or Vajraasana. Hands on knees in dhyaan/jnaan mudraa i.e., tips of thumb and forefinger touching each other. Inhale as deep as possible. Eyes softly closed for full concentration. Exhale slowly. Breathing only up to lungs. No role of stomach.

Kapaalabhaati: A very important Pranaayaama, the only one in which all the vital organs such as lungs, heart, stomach, kidneys, liver, pancreas, intestines, spleen, uterus, prostate gland etc. are put to exercise. Sit erect in Siddhaasana, Padmaasana, Sukhaasana or Vajraasana. Hands on knees in dhyaan/jnaan mudraa, i.e., tips of thumb and forefinger touching each other. Exhale. Just Exhale. Eyes softly closed. Stomach to be pushed back maximum possible. No effort to inhale. It will be automatic. Normal position of stomach automatically. Recommended speed sixty times a minute. Those with heart disease or blood pressure to do it slowly. Start with five minutes at a time. Take it slowly to fifteen minutes in one go.

Baahya Praanaayaama: Sit erect. Hands on knees in dhyaan/jnaanmudraa i.e., tips of thumb and forefinger touching each other. Inhale deep. Exhale wholly. Hold. Simultaneously chin in the hollow space in the collar bone, stomach pushed maximum backwards, and anus and urinary system pulled up. Remain as long as possible. Coming back, loosen everything and inhale slowly. Those suffering from heart disease or blood pressure to do it slowly.

Anuloma-Viloma: Another important Praanaayaama. Sit erect. Left hand on knee in dhyaan/ jnaanmudraa. Press to close the right nostril with the right thumb. Inhale through left nostril. Leave the right nostril and close the left nostril with two middle fingers of the same hand. Exhale. Inhale. Leave the left and press and close the right nostril. Exhale. Inhale through the left, exhale through the right. Continue. End at exhale at the left. Keep the right elbow in a position that it does not obstruct inhaling and exhaling.

6. & 7. Bhraamaree, Udgeetha and Pranava in one go. Sit erect. For Bhraamaree, close your earlobes with your thumbs. Place the forefingers on your forehead above your eyes. Close the eyes with the remaining three fingers. Breathe as deep as possible. While exhaling try to pronounce 'Aum' with your nose, resulting in a humming sound as of a black-bee – *bhramara*. Repeat it thrice. Eyes to remain closed. Breathe deep for Udgeetha. Breathe as deep as possible. Exhale slowly pronouncing 'Aum' as long as possible. This will also be done thrice. Eyes to remain closed. Chant 'Aum' in silence for Pranava. Repeat it thrice. Raise your hands up. Rub your palms, place them on your closed eyes, open the eyes slowly.

CONCLUDING SHAANTI-PAATHA: Aum Dyaauh Shaantih, Antariksham Shaantih, Prithvee Shaanti-raapah Shaanti-roshadhayah Shaanti-r-vasaspatayah Shaantih, Vishve Devaah Shaantih, Brahma Shaantih, Sarvam Shaantih, Shaantireva, Shaantis-saa Maa, Shaantiredhi. -- Aum Shaantih Shaantih Shaantih.

MUDRAS

In the practice of yog (yog-sadhana), in addition to the eight steps of yog (astanga-yog), Mudras are also very important. Mudras are the developed forms of asanas. In asanas, senses are primary and prana is secondary, whereas in Mudras senses are secondary and Pranas are primary. There is no other action on this earth gives the same results as of mudra.:

Hand Mudras that regulate the elements: This whole universe has been constituted by five elements. Our body has also been made from the union of five elements. The five fingers in our hand represent the five elements. The thumb represent fire, index finger air, middle finger space, ring finger earth and the little finger water. The body remains healthy if the five elements are in balance whereas any disturbance in this balance results in diseases. According to the science of Mudras, the coordinated action of these five elements controls the internal glands, body parts and their functions are regulated and the dormant powers of the body are awakened.

The hand mudras become effective instantly. The hand by which these Mudras are made, the part of the body opposite to it starts showing signs of effect immediately. These Mudras can be performed in any way- while standing, sitting or walking. It is more beneficial to perform them sitting in Vajrasana, Padmasana or Sukhasana. Practising these Mudras daily for 10 minutes in the beginning and later on doing them for 30-45 minutes will give complete benefit. If you cannot do them at a stretch then do them in 2-3 installments. While performing any Mudra, the fingers that are not being used, should be kept straight.

GYAN OR DHYAN MUDRA: Touch the tips of the thumb and the index finger with each other, keeping the remaining three fingers straight.

Benefits:

- It helps develop the stages of Dharna and meditation. Concentration improves and negative thoughts get reduced.
- It increases the memory power, therefore, its regular practice makes the children become intelligent and bright.

The brain nerves become strong. Headache, insomnia, and stress are removed. It destroys anger. For better results, perform Prana mudra after this mudra.

VAYU MUDRA: Joining the index finger with the root of the thumb and putting slight pressure on it with the thumb results in Vayu Mudra. The remaining three fingers should be kept straight.

Benefits: Regular practice of this mudra eliminates all vayu related problems - gout, arthritis, joints pain, paralysis, parkinson, sciatica, knee pain and gas formation like diseases. Provides relief in the pain of the neck and spine. The disorders relating to blood circulation are removed.

SHOONYA MUDRA: The middle finger represents the space element, this finger is touched at the root of the thumb and light pressure applied with the thumb. The remaining fingers should be kept straight.

Benefits: This mudra cures secretion from the ears, ear pain, deafness and hearing impairment problem, etc. if practiced at least one hour daily, continuously over a long period. It cures weakness of bones and heart diseases. The gums become strong and benefit is obtained in throat diseases and thyroid problems.

Precaution: Do not do this mudra while eating and strolling.

PRITHVI MUDRA: Join the tips of ring finger and thumb and keep the remaining three fingers straight, this makes Prthvi Mudra .

Benefits: Regular practice of this mudra cures weakness of the body, leanness (underweight), and obesity etc. This mudra improves digestive power, develops vitality and sattvic qualities, and removes the deficiency of vitamins. It makes the body active, bright and glowing.

PRANA MUDRA: This Mudra is made by touching the tips of the little finger, the ring finger and the thumb. The remaining two fingers should be kept straight.

Benefits: This Mudra enables awakening of prana shakti lying dormant, and the body becomes active, healthy and energetic. It cures eye problems and improves the eyesight. It enhances body's immunity to diseases, removes the deficiency of vitamins, and removes fatigue as also rejuvenates the body. Due to this there is no problem of hunger and thirst during long hours of fasting. In case of insomnia, it provides benefits if done in conjunction with Jnana mudra.

APANA MUDRA: This Mudra is made by touching the tips of the thumb, the ring finger and the middle finger and keeping the remaining two fingers straight.

Benefits: Any foreign matter in the body gets thrown out and the body is purified. Practicing this Mudra cures constipation, piles, vata-dosa, diabetes, obstructions in passing urine, problems related to the kidneys, teeth troubles, etc. it is a beneficial mudra for the stomach. It helps in heart related problems and causes perspiration.

Precaution: This mudra is diuretic.

APANA VAYU MUDRA: Performing Apana mudra and Vayu Mudra together is known as Apana-vayu mudra. The little finger remains straight.

Benefits: It cures heart and Vata-dosa related problems and makes the body healthier. Those who are suffering from a weak heart should practice it daily. In the event of a heart attack, performing this mudra gives relief. It releases any gas accumulated in the stomach. It is beneficial in headache, asthma and high blood pressure. Performing this mudra 5-7 minutes before climbing up the stairs provides comfort.

VARUNA MUDRA: Touch the little finger with the thumb.

Benefits: This mudra removes dryness of the body and makes the skin soft and shinning. It cures skin diseases, blood disorders, pimples, and diseases arising out of deficiency of the water element. It makes the face beautiful.

Caution: People having kapha prakrti (constitution) should not practice it in excess.