

Zen Resort Bali : PRANAYAMA



Pranayama is the science and technique of regulated and effective breathing. Breathing is the act where we take air (“prana”) from the atmosphere into our lungs, absorb oxygen from it into the blood supply, and exhale the air together with carbon dioxide and water vapour. The act of inhalation and exhalation is repeated about every five seconds. Each time we take in some 500 mil. of air and thus some 7 liters of air per minute are exhaled and inhaled.

Breathing is so simple and obvious that we it is taken for granted. It is ironic we are rarely taught how to breathe air in, to hold the air in, and to breathe out is the basis of life, since without this we cannot survive even for a few minutes.

Air is the most important elements as it moves the three doshas – vata, pitta and kapha- from one part of the body to another and it analyses and separates the body’s elements and excretions. Prana provides energy to all the limbs, organs and glands of the body and thus enables effective functioning. It is Prana energy, which enables eyesight, hearing, nasal smell and vocal speech. Prana lends luster to our faces, makes our minds think and enables alimentary system to digest and assimilate the food we intake.



The practice of Pranayama is critical to maximizing the effective capacity of the lungs, the fundamental purifying engine of our body. Our lungs comprise of some 73 million cells and in normal breathing only a third of the lung cells get oxygenated. Increased and effective utilization of the lung capacity would have a major impact on our physical, mental and spiritual well-being.

Normal breathing patterns shows marked changes under various conditions. For example, while doing and physical exercises and work, walking uphill and rapidly, lifting or carrying heavy loads etc, we automatically begin to breathe more rapidly and more forcefully. At high altitudes, in a rarefied atmosphere our breathing becomes heavier. Breathing patterns also change with emotional excitement and in cases of health disorders such as asthma, bronchitis, and other lung affections. We are hardly aware of the fact that we are breathing, except in situations where there is difficulty in breathing.



There is recognition that the ones life span relates to the number of times one breathes. In the animal world, the tortoise’s breathing frequency is among the lowest about five times a minute, and it has the longest life span – some 400 years, and in contrast small bird breathing with rapid frequency of 60 times a minute lives a year or so. It is said that nature determines life span on the basis of the number of respirations.

There are three important Pranayama exercises that pertain to controlling and regulating breathing. Ujjayi pranayama, the “sounding” breath involves constricting the back of the throat while breathing to create the “ah” sound. The benefits of this include focusing the mind, increasing mindfulness and generating internal heat and energy. Dirgha pranayama is a deep breathing technique that uses the diaphragmatic or “belly” breathing. It is highly effective in relaxing the mind and the body, oxygenating the blood and purging the lungs of carbon dioxide and other impurities. Nadi Shodhana pranayama comprises alternate nostril breathing, particularly effective towards cleansing the air channels, overcoming anxiety and stress and enabling logic and clarity in thinking.



At birth humans are deeper belly breathers which is natural and healthier. As we grow the environmental factors and stress causes changes in our breathing. Most adults become shallow chest breathers whereby the bottom third of the lungs is hardly used. It is important to regain the natural ability to breathe in a slow, deeper and healthier manner. A daily practice of some 20 minutes of the seven Pranayama exercises discussed above would be beneficial to

strengthening the lungs and increasing breathing capacity.



Effective breathing is important to increase blood oxygen levels that enables a proper and proportional balance of the three doshas, vata, pita and kapha. This balance is essential to improve nutritional metabolism and through this to strengthen resistance against a range of diseases and ailments. Pranayama exercises have been effective in preventing and treating conditions such as asthma, high and low blood pressure, stress-related heart ailments,

hyperactivity, insomnia, chronic pain, obesity, diabetes, high cholesterol, allergies, migraine, premature hair graying, facial wrinkles, early ageing, and other physical and psychological disorders.



We know that as long as one is breathing, one is alive and that when breathe stops, life comes to an end. Hence learning to breathe effectively and efficiently is of critical importance in maintaining and achieving physical, psychological and spiritual health and life longevity

Zen Resort Bali: Seven Pranayama exercises for health and beauty

During the morning yoga class at Zen Resort, you will have the opportunity to learn the seven basic pranayama exercises. In each of the following exercises sit on the floor in a comfortable Yoga Asana position such as for example, lotus position with the back

straight. These exercises may also be done sitting in a straight back chair. Rest the back of your hands on your knees and with moderate pressure and connect the tip of your thumb to the tip of your index finger for both hands. Close your eyes and concentrate on the space between your eyebrows and try to empty the mind of all thoughts and think positively of peace and joy. Take a deep breath until lungs are full with air and breathe out slowly. Repeat this five times and you will be ready to do the following seven exercises for about 3 minutes each.

It is important to do the following exercises at slow speed to begin with and gradually over time to build up the speed and forcefulness of breathing in and out to moderate and higher levels. Also depending on your lung capacity and fitness and health, subsequently you may increase the time to about 5 minutes for each of the exercises. Note that if at anytime you feel strain and discomfort then stop and rest before continuing any of the exercises.

Prana 1 (Bhasrika Pranayama): Breathe in through both nostrils forcefully until lungs are full, the chest expanded and the diaphragm stretched. Then breathe out forcefully until lungs are empty. Repeat this for about 3 minutes. Another version of this exercise is to sit with legs folded at the knee and raising and fully stretching both hands up as one breathes in then pull the hands down to shoulder level as one breathes out. **BENEFITS:** This exercise brings about a proper balance of the three doshas, namely Vata, Pitta and Kapha. It is particularly beneficial to treating ailments such as cold, cough, tonsillitis, throat infections, allergy, asthma and other respiratory diseases.

Prana 2 (Kapal-Bhati Pranayama): Repeat Prana 1 except that the breathing in is normally and breathing out is with as maximum a force as possible. Repeat this for about 3 minutes. **BENEFITS:** This exercise is highly effective in normalizing blood sugar levels. It improves functioning and efficiency of the abdominal activity of organs such as pancreas, kidney, prostate, spleen etc. It is particularly effective in relieving ailments such as constipation, acidity, artery blockages etc.

Prana 3 (Bahya Pranayama): Breathe out as much as possible and hold your breath to the maximum time feasible. When you desire to breathe in, do it slowly until lungs are full. Repeat this for about 3 minutes. **BENEFITS;** Same as in Prana 3 and particularly effective with regard to improving digestion.

Prana 4 (Anulom-Viloma Pranayama): This exercise involves closing the left and right nostrils alternatively. With the right thumb close the right nostril. Breathe in slowly through the left nostril until lungs are filled and chest expanded. Close the left hand nostril with the second and third fingers. Open the right nostril by releasing the thumb and breathe out very slowly with the right hand nostril until lungs are empty. Repeat this for about 3 minutes. **BENEFITS:** This exercise is effective in dealing with Vata dosha imbalances which affects ailments such as rheumatism, gout, urinary infections etc. and also improves blood circulation and is effective in reducing cholesterol levels. .

Prana 5 (Bhramari Pranayama): Close your mouth. Breathe in through both nostrils until lungs are filled. Close your left and right eyes with the two middle fingers of the left and right hands. Similarly close your ears with the left and right thumbs. Press the forehead with the left and right hand index fingers lightly. Breathe out slowly, making a humming sound of a bee while reciting “Om” mentally. Repeat for about 3 minutes. BENEFITS: This exercise, ideal for meditation, is effective in relieving stress and other related symptoms such as high blood pressure

Prana 6 (Omkar Japa): Close your eyes and breathe in through both nostrils slowly with the “OM” sound. Hold your breath to the maximum time possible. Breathe out slowly with the “OM” sound. Repeat for 3 minutes. BENEFITS: This exercise improves concentration and mental agility and when practiced at bedtime is highly effective in inducing deep and peaceful sleep

Prana 7 (Nadi Shodhan Pranayama): As in Prana 5, close the right hand nostril and inhale slowly through the left hand nostril as deeply as possible. Hold your breath to the maximum time possible and exhale through the right hand nostril until lungs are empty. Now breathe in slowly through the right hand nostril. Hold your breath for maximum time possible and next breathe out through the left hand nostril and again breathe in through the left hand nostril. Repeat this exercise for about 3 minutes. BENEFITS: As in the case of Prana 5.