

# Pranayama Practice

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It is important to practice pranayama on an empty stomach during the sandhi kala (joining times), which are the junctions between darkness and daylight: dawn and dusk. Sanyasins, who do not have a married life but follow yoga, can also practice pranayama at midday and midnight, as these are also sandhi times. To do pranayama, sit facing east or north in a comfortable cross-legged posture such as svastikasana (pose for easy awareness) or padmasana (lotus pose). Make sure your head, neck and chest are in a straight line, keeping the spine stretched.

In general, pranayama should not be done during menstruation or pregnancy or by anyone with fever, bronchitis, pleurisy with effusion, pneumonia or a recent history of heart attack. Also, a person with highly metastasized cancer should not perform pranayama nor should they while undergoing chemo- or radiation therapy. Nor should a person suffering from severe psychological conditions such as grief, sadness, anger or suicidal depression engage in pranayama. There should be a gap of at least one hour before or after bathing, eating or sexual activity and doing pranayama.

## BHASTRIKA *Bellows Breath*

Start with 20 breaths (this is 1 round), rest for a few minutes, then 20 more breaths.

2nd week of practice can do 30 breaths for 2 rounds.

3rd week of practice can do 40 breaths for 2 rounds.

4th week of practice can do 50 breaths for 2 rounds.

Maximum of 50 breaths for 2 rounds.

CONTRAINDICATIONS high blood pressure, glaucoma, hydrocele, hernia or ascites. Do only in moderation for pitta conditions.

## KAPALA BHATI *Shining Skull Breath*

Start with 100 breaths (1 round), rest a few minutes, then 100 more breaths.

2nd week of practice can do 200 breaths for 2 rounds (or 2nd month).

3rd week of practice can do 300 breaths for 2 rounds.

By 5th week of practice can do 500 breaths for 2 rounds.

CONTRAINDICATIONS detached retina, glaucoma, migraine headache, high or low blood pressure, heart problems, nose bleeds, hernia, ascites, ulcers, recent history of epilepsy or recent abdominal surgery. Anyone with hypertension should only do this pranayama with great care. If vata individuals experience vertigo, the practice should be discontinued.

## ANULOMA VILOMA *Alternate Nostril Breathing*

Start with 20 rounds. One round is inhale into 1 nostril, exhale out the other; inhale into other nostril, exhale out original nostril.

2nd week of practice can do 30 rounds.

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3rd week of practice can do 40 rounds and so on up to 50 rounds. If you are comfortable with 30, then stick with 30 rounds.  
CONTRAINDICATIONS chest pain, extremely high blood pressure or recent history of epilepsy.

## AGNI SAR

One round is the single breath with the 10 abdominal movements. Perform only one round.

## BHRAMARI *Bee or Humming Breath*

Start with 7 rounds of Humming Breath. Can add 1 round per week, up to 17 rounds only. Do not do more than 17 rounds.

CONTRAINDICATIONS chest pain, extremely high blood pressure, recent history of epilepsy or ear infection.

## UJJAYI *Conch Breath or Breath of Victory*

Do 7 rounds of Ujjayi Pranayama. Can add 1 round per week, up to 17 rounds only. Do not do more than 17 rounds.

CONTRAINDICATIONS chest pain, high blood pressure, recent history of epilepsy.

## SHITALI *Cooling Breath*

Do 7 rounds of Shitali.

CONTRAINDICATIONS Avoid performing in heavily polluted air.

## SHITKARI *Cooling Breath, alternative to Shitali*

Start with 7 rounds of Shitkari.

NOTE Shitali and shitkari are the most important pranayama for pitta people and those with aggravated pitta.

## UTGEET

Do 7 rounds of Utgeet Pranayama.

## SO'HAM MEDITATION

Do So'Ham Breathing for 5 to 10 minutes to rest and integrate the results of the pranayamas.

PRECAUTIONS Pranayama is a powerful and transformative practice. Vasant Lad's instructions in the video can be followed by experienced yoga and pranayama practitioners. However, beginners will need to start slowly with lower numbers of repetitions in each round, increasing these numbers when they feel grounded and stable. So they could take Vasant Lad's recommendations, cut them in half (or even to one-quarter) and still enjoy great benefits. If you have any symptoms of dizziness, spaciness or other disturbance, please consult an experienced yoga teacher for further guidance.