

Cultural Education

Ettimadai Campus

Pranayama:

'Pra' is a prefix meaning constant 'An' means movement. Prana means 'constant motion'. Prana is the constant life force. 'Pranayama' is the expanding of the dimensions of prana.

Pranayama, the yogic art of breathing, leads to a control of the emotions which in turn brings stability, concentration and mental poise. Pranayama is a mental bridge that helps the practitioner of yoga to cross from the realm of purely physical development to that of the spirit and forms a crucial journey towards self realization.

Pranayama practice is the conscious prolongation of inhalation, retention and exhalation. Inhalation is the act of receiving the primeval energy in the form of breath, and retention is when the breath is held in order to savour that energy. In exhalation all thoughts and emotions are emptied with breath: then while the lungs are empty, one surrenders the individual energy 'I' to the primeval energy, the Atma.

Exhalation is the outflow of the individual energy to unite with the cosmic energy. It quiets and silences the brain. It is the surrender of the ego to and immersion in the self.

Kumbhaka is the withdrawal of the intellect from the organs of perception and action, to focus on the seat of the Atma, the origin of consciousness. Kumbhaka keeps the practitioner silent at the physical, moral, mental and spiritual levels.

The practice of pranayama develops a steady mind, strong willpower and sound judgement.

As long as there is breath in the body, there is life. When breath in body there is life. When breath departs, so too does life. Therefore, regulate the breath. Hatha Yoga Pradeepika –Ch 2: S3

Pranayama affects the rhythmic expansion of lungs creating proper circulation of lungs, creating the proper circulation of bodily fluids within the kidneys, liver, spleen, intestines, skin and other organs, as well as the surface of the other torso.

Pranayama increases digestion, vigour, vitality, perception and memory. It frees the mind from the grasp of the body, sharpens the intellect and illumines the self.

As wind drives away smoke and impurities from the atmosphere and its inherent quality is to burn and purify the area, pranayama is a divine fire which cleanses the organs, senses, mind, intellect and ego.

Pranayama purifies the nadis, protects the internal organs and cells, and neutralizes lactic acid, which causes fatigue, so that the recovery is quick.

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Practice of pranayama quietens the upsurge of the senses and desires. The practitioners words, thoughts and deeds become clean and pure. It helps him maintain firmness in the body and steadiness in his intellect.

As the rising sun slowly disperses the darkness of night, pranayama removes the impurities and refines the practitioner and prepares the body and mind to become fit for concentration and meditation. *Patanjali Yoga Sutra, II 52, 53*

Pranayama helps flow of pure blood which tones the nerves, brains, spinal cord and cardiac muscles, thus maintaining their efficiency.

The sweat glands act as accessory micro-kidneys, especially when stimulated by pranayama.

Master Samvritti Pranayama (equal, duration of inhalation, exhalation, and retention) before attempting visama pravritti (breathing with different ratios and duration).

Pranayama helps regulate one's conduct and energy perfectly.

Pranayama when performed properly diseases disappear and a radiant state of well being, enlightenment and serenity is experienced.

Correct practice increases ability to have positive control over desires and leads towards the realisation of the self, giving absolute control over senses.

The practice of pranayama is safe during the menstrual period. Yet uddiyana must be avoided.

When the breath is steady or unsteady, so is the mind, and with it the practitioner. Hence, the breath must be controlled. *Hatha Yoga Pradeepika Ch II. 2*

Inhalation is the intake of cosmic energy by the individual for his growth and progress. It is uniting the infinite with the finite. It draws in the breath of life as carefully and as gently as the fragrance of a flower may be indrawn and distributes it evenly throughout the body.

Pranayama involves three actions inhalation, exhalation and retention. Retention is of two types internal and external.

Pranayama when performed properly diseases disappear and a radiant state of well being, enlightenment and serenity is experienced.

Pranayama is of four types:

Purificatory or Sensitising pranayamas : Akasha Pranayama (space breath), Prana Mudra Pranayama (invocation of energy), Hasta Mudra Pranayama (hand gesture breath).

Balancing Pranayama: Nadi Shodhana Pranayama (psychic network purification).

Tranquillising Pranayama: Sheetal (cooling breath) pranayama, Seetkari (hissing breath) Pranayama, Kaki (crow's beak breath) Pranayama, Ujjayi Pranayama (psychic breath), Bhramari Pranayama (humming bee breath), Moorchha Pranayama (swooning or fainting breath), Chandra Bheda Pranayama (moon piercing breath), Chandra Anga Pranayama (moon part breath).

Energising or Vitalising Pranayama: Swana Pranayama (panting breath), Bhastrika Pranayama (bellows breath), Kapalbhati Pranayama (frontal brain cleansing breath). Surya Bheda Pranayama (vitality stimulating breath), Surya Anga Pranayama (sun part breath), Plavini Pranayama (inundating breath).